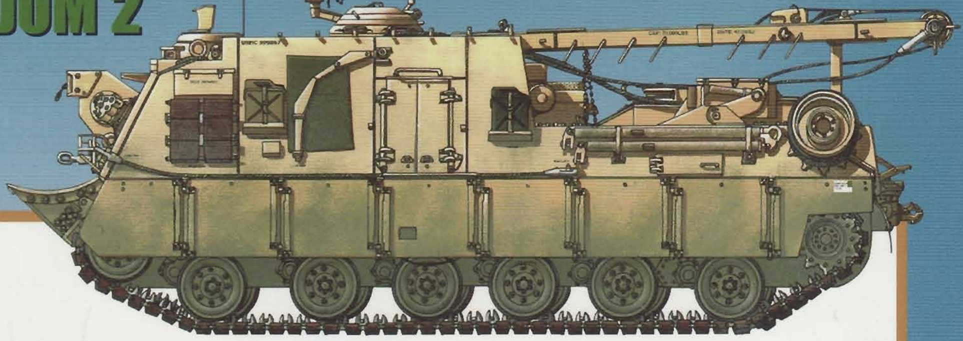
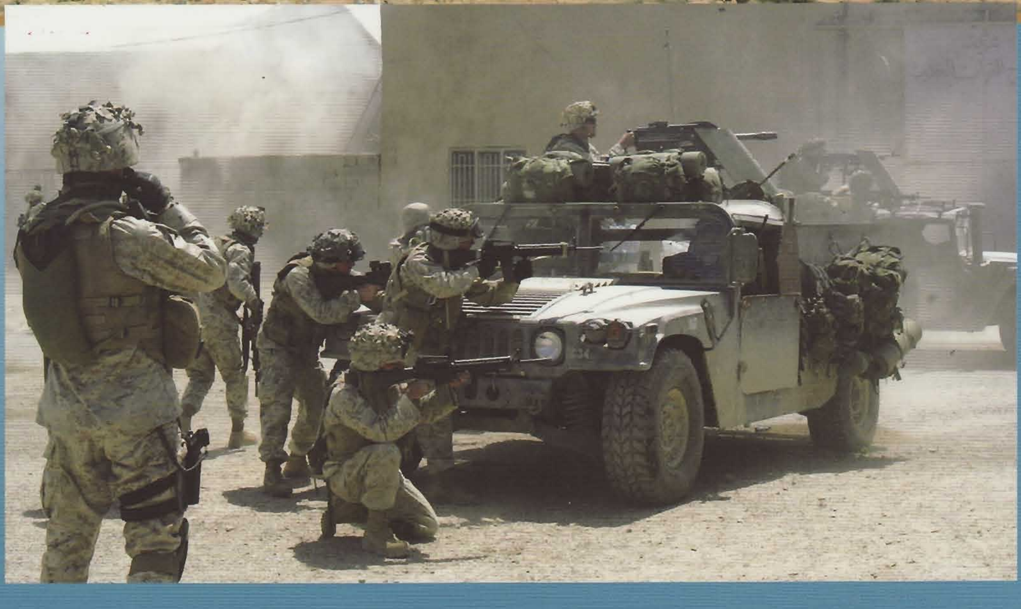
MINI COLOR SERIES 7517

MARINES ON THE GROUND

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM 2

Gordon Arthur





18.–

MINI COLOR SERIES 7517

MARINES ON THE GROUND

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM 2

Including Fallujah Battle Account by Andreas Elesky, MSgt. USMC (Ret.)

Text by Gordon Arthur

Illustrations by Hubert Cance

Copyright © 2007
by CONCORD PUBLICATIONS CO.
10/F, B1, 603-609 Castle Peak Road
Kong Nam Industrial Building
Tsuen Wan, New Territories
Hong Kong
www.concord-publications.com

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise, without the prior written permission of Concord Publications Co.

We welcome authors who can help expand our range of books. If you would like to submit material, please feel free to contact us.

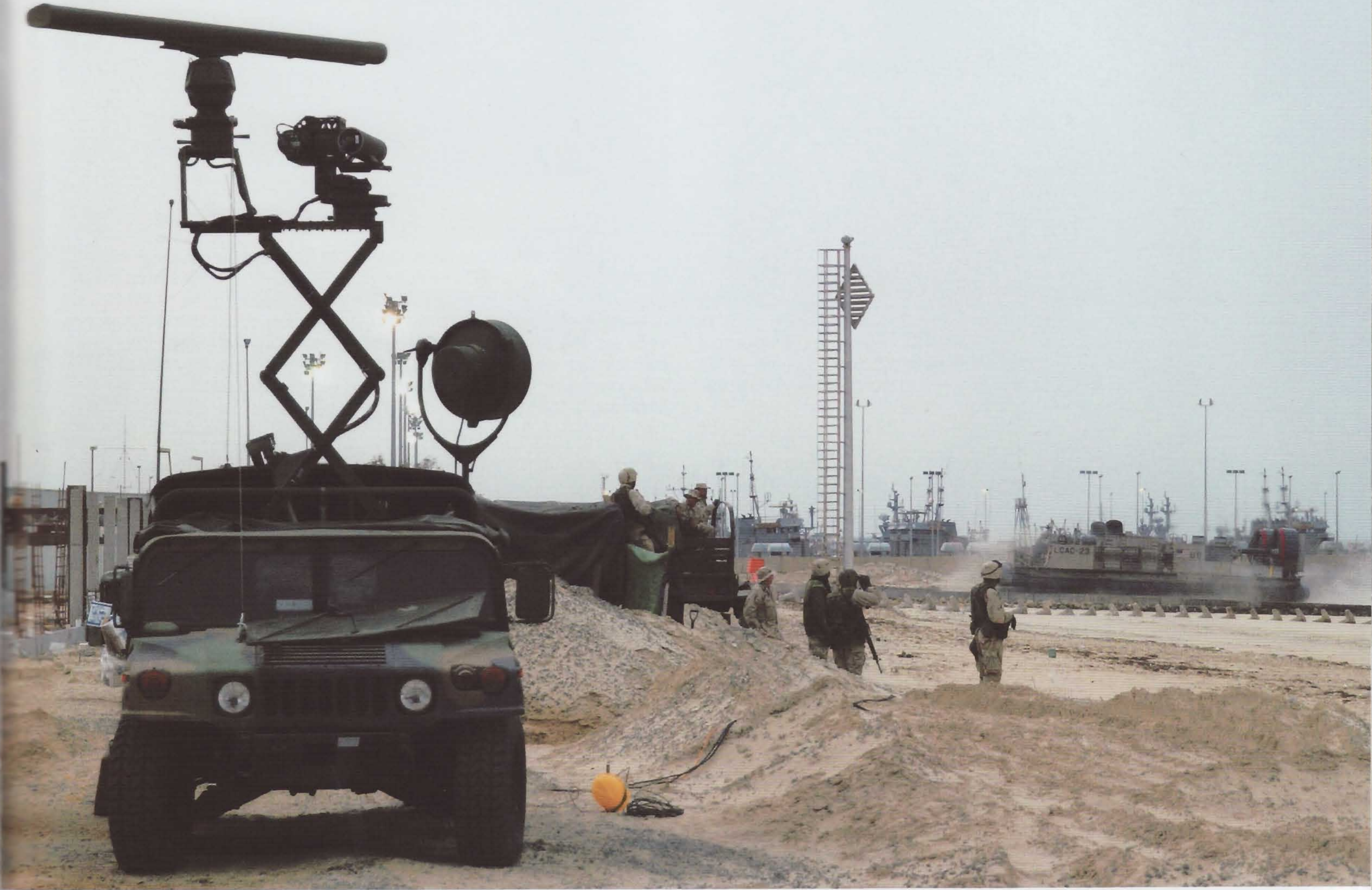
We are always on the look-out for new, unpublished photos for this series. If you have photos or slides or information you feel may be useful to future volumes, please send them to us for possible future publication. Full photo credits will be given upon publication.

ISBN 962-361-140-4
printed in Hong Kong

Acknowledgements
The author wishes to extend his gratitude to Mike Mummey (MSgt. USMC Ret.), who generously invested a considerable amount of time in proofreading the text and making suggestions for improvements. Of course, thanks are also due Andreas Elesky, whose personal "memoirs" of combat in Fallujah provide a vital human element.

Foreword

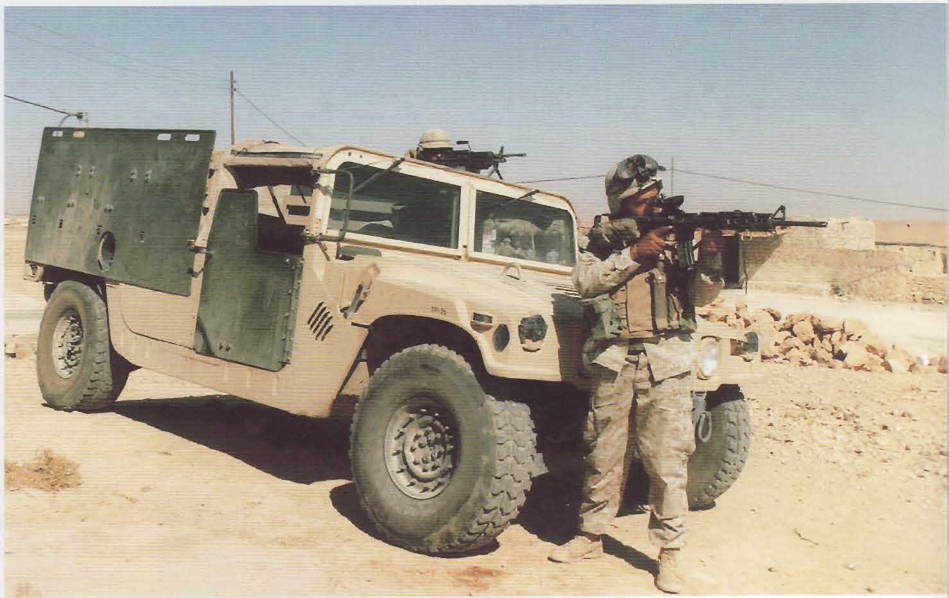
This volume is the second examining the operational involvement of the USMC (United States Marines Corps) in Iraq. The focus here is on OIF 2 (Operation Iraqi Freedom 2), and is confined to the time period of the return of Marine units to Iraq in March 2004, through to the end of March 2005. As in the first volume, photographs taken by official USMC combat photographers tell much of the story - their photos are used with acknowledgement, and names are credited wherever possible. As before, the focus of this book remains primarily on the wide range of equipment and vehicles used by Marines as they prosecute the unrelenting "War on Terror" in the turbulent nation of Iraq.



An LCAC (Landing Craft Air Cushion) ferries supplies ashore from the amphibious assault ship USS Bataan in March 2004 (Note: all subsequent dates, unless otherwise specified, refer to 2004) as part of the USMC's second deployment to Iraq. In the foreground is a mobile sensor platform - essentially a Humvee fitted with radar, infrared and visual sensors - belonging to MIUWU 206 (Mobile Inshore Undersea Warfare Unit). (Journalist 2nd Class Wes Eplen, USN)

U.S. Marines succeeded in slashing their way through six Iraqi divisions in March and April of 2003, capturing the eastern sector of Baghdad weeks ahead of schedule (see Concord Mini Color Series Volume 7516). The latter part of April 2003 had been an occasion of rejoicing for most of the Iraqi population. They were free from the tyranny of Saddam Hussein's brutal regime, and their joyful mood was summed up in the toppling of a giant statue of Iraq's feared dictator in Baghdad's Firdos Square on 9 April. Yet this newfound exhilaration was not to last. Before long, rampant lawlessness was spreading through the cities and towns of Iraq. Adding volatile fuel to the fire were Ba'athists, Saddam loyalists, and terrorist groups plotting bloodshed and mayhem against their Coalition "liberators." Once initial combat operations to oust Saddam Hussein were over in 2003, the units of I MEF (Marine Expeditionary Force) had redeployed back to their home bases, most of which were in California.

In the wake of the liberation of Iraq in 2003, the second ongoing American troop rotation, known as OIF 2, began to be implemented. Troop rotations to Iraq occurred in phases so there was a wide divergence in dates for various unit

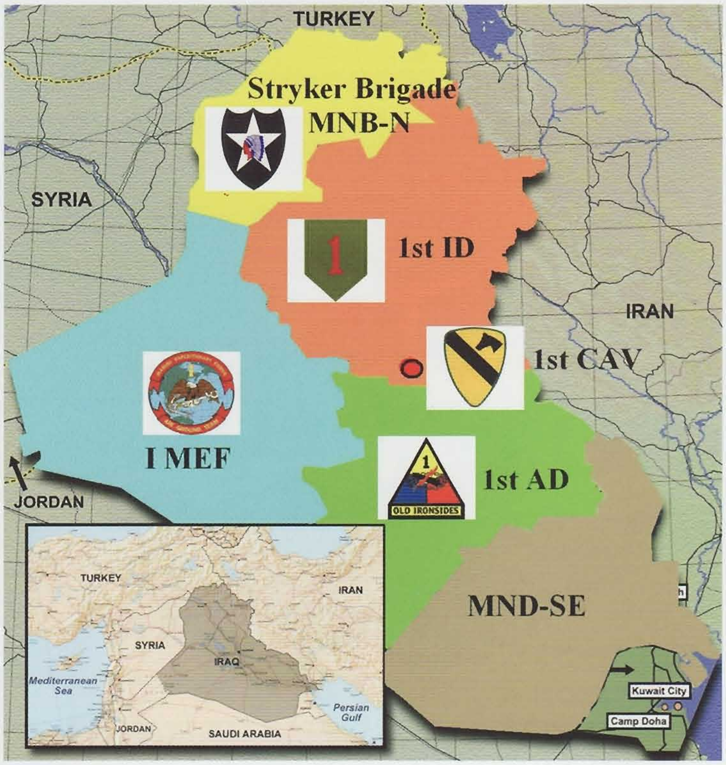


A patrol from Weapons Company, 2/7 Battalion. In January 2004, the MROC (Marine Requirements Oversight Council) validated the requirement that all I MEF wheeled tactical vehicles be armored before entering Iraq in March. Thus, I MEF placed varying degrees of armor on its 2000 or so Humvees. (LCpl. Kevin Quihuis Jr., USMC)

While a machine gunner stands ready with a .50-cal M2 HB in his M1043 Humvee, other team members apprehend a suspected insurgent in September 2004. These Marines are part of the 4th LAAD (Low Altitude Air Defense) Battalion operating from Al Asad Airbase. (Cpl. Joel Chaverri, USMC)

deployments. According to the plan, the 135,000 U.S. troops already stationed in Iraq would be progressively withdrawn and replaced by approximately 110,000 in OIF 2. Things did not work out exactly as originally planned though, with the widening insurgency resulting in 140,000 troops eventually being fielded in Iraq during this period.

Marines were amongst those who received orders to return to the Middle East again, and though the task was different this time, it was no less daunting. The first Marine units began shipping out from their bases in the USA in February 2004. During OIF 2, the USMC presence in Iraq revolved around I MEF (commanded by LtGen. James T. Conway) and the 1st MarDiv (Marine Division) led by MajGen. Mattis. This force rotation was supported by the *USS Boxer* (LHD4) and *USS Bataan* (LHD5), which provided initial amphibious lift and logistical support. More than 50% of the personnel of the 1st MarDiv were veterans of OIF 1. The other principal American combat formations simultaneously deployed in Iraq were the Army's 1st Infantry Division (1 ID) and 1st Cavalry Division (1 CAV).



Disposition of U.S. forces in Iraq during OIF 2. The blue area is the territory assigned to I MEF.

A Mk.23 MTVR (Medium Tactical Vehicle Replacement) of 3/7 Marines being used on a CA (Civil Affairs) mission. Unusually, this vehicle has no extra armor of any kind, and no weapon is fitted on the roof M66 ring mount. When developing the first generation of up-armored Marine vehicles, the preferred choice was for 3/8-inch HHS (High Hard Steel), but this was not available from the industry in time for I MEF's March 2004 deadline. Instead, 3/16-inch HHS plates were used. (LCpl. Michael McMaugh, USMC)

I MEF was organized as a classic MAGTF (Marine Air Ground Task Force), with the 1st MarDiv acting as the primary ground combat element. Major ground combat assets of this division were split between RCT-3 (Regimental Combat Team) and RCT-7. The command element was made up of I MEF HQ Group, while the 3rd MAW (Marine Air Wing) acted as the air combat element. Logistics support was provided by the 1st FSSG (Force Service Support Group). During the course of the year, the 11th, 24th and 31st MEUs (Marine Expeditionary Units) were also deployed to Iraq.

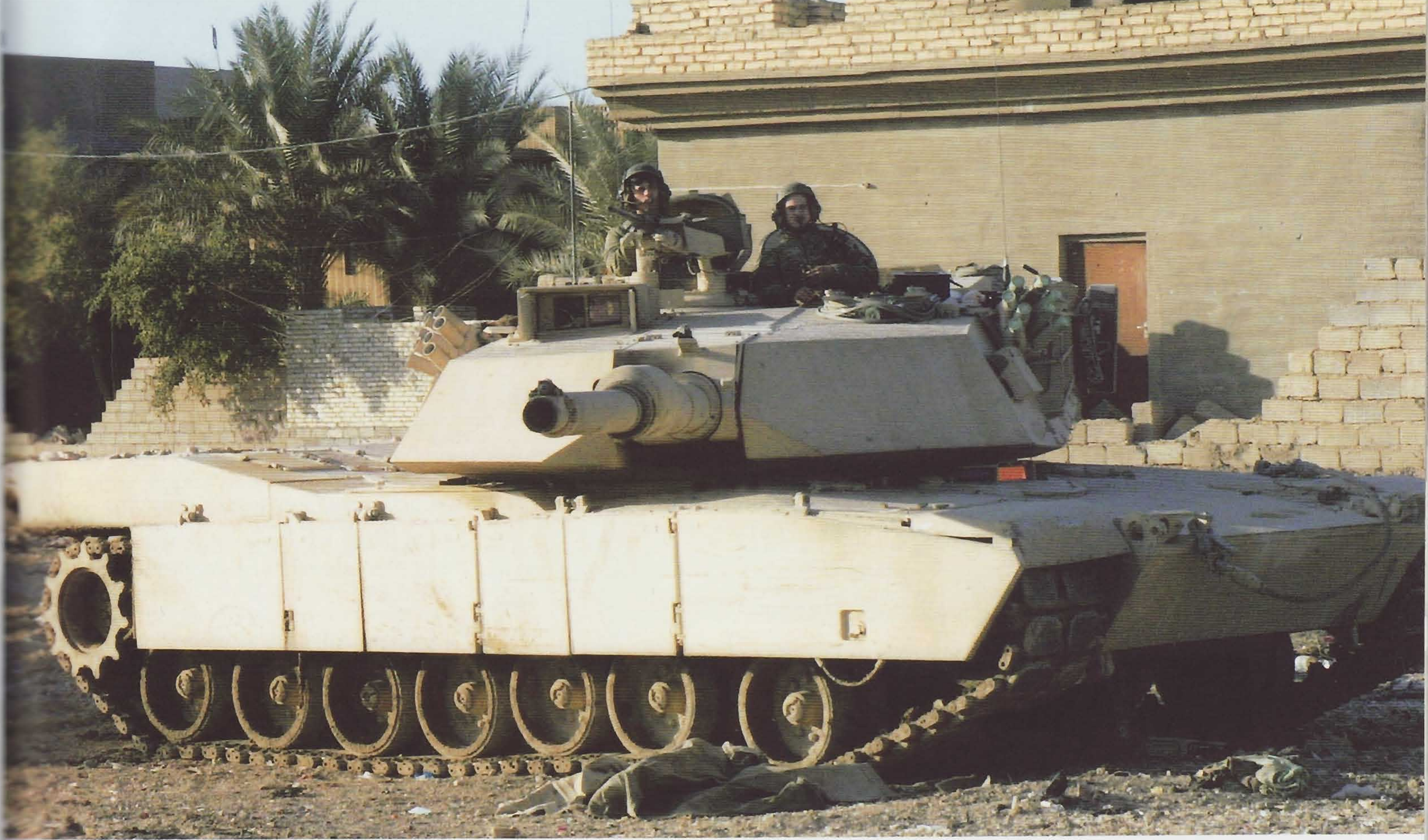
On 7 July 2004, it was announced that 26,427 Marines were currently in Iraq. This number was split between approximately 80% active and 20% reserve personnel. The overall picture is complicated by the fact that Marine tactical units deployed for seven months at a time, while headquarters and command elements deployed for periods of 12 months. This meant there were continual arrivals and departures of units. The "Leathernecks" were given responsibility for Al Anbar, a province of 138,501km^2 in the southwest of Iraq. Although only around 20% of Iraq's population is Sunni, in this province the figure is 80%. The growing sense of sullenness and resistance amongst Iraqis was nowhere felt stronger than in Al Anbar province.

The arrival of I MEF allowed the incumbent 82nd Airborne "All American" Division to depart from Al Anbar. Transfer of authority to I MEF officially took place on 20 March 2004. This province, with its 1,170,193 inhabitants, is probably the most dangerous region in the whole of Iraq in terms of insurgent activity and attacks. Its area covers much of the so-called "Sunni Triangle," and American units have suffered numerous casualties there. Even Saddam Hussein was wary of the area with its religious fanaticism and fierce sense of tribal identity. The province shares long land borders with Syria, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. For Marines stationed there, duties revolved around SASO (Security and Stabilization Operations), though on more than one occasion, events flared up into fully-fledged battles.

The capital of the province is Ar Ramadi, with other major cities being Abu Ghraib, Al Qa'im, Anah, Fallujah, Hit, and Hadithah. The name *'Anbar'* actually means "the warehouse," since the region was once used as the supply warehouse for Persian Sassanid troops. Most of the province is desert, though lush vegetation is found along the banks of the Euphrates River and surrounding irrigated areas. At the end of its yearlong tenure, I MEF officially transferred authority of MNF-W (Multi-National Force – West) to II MEF on 27 March 2005.

Primary Marine bases in Al Anbar province

There are 12 principal bases used by the USMC in Al Anbar province, the



Guard duty - this M1A1 Abrams of Charlie Company, 2nd Tank Battalion, posts security in Fallujah in late December 2004. It has just fired rounds from its main gun into a house suspected of harboring insurgents. The sand-colored tank bears no obvious markings, but a tow cable is attached in case a recovery mission needs to be carried out swiftly. (LCpl. Jeremy Ferguson, USMC).

largest of Iraq's 18 provinces. Most of these bases were renamed when I MEF took over responsibility from the 82nd Airborne Division in March 2004. An order was swiftly issued on 25 March by I MEF's commanding general for all bases to take on names related to the areas they were located in. This was just one method used in a wider effort to better relate to the local Iraqi population. The same order stated that in "the spirit of the Marine Corps, these bases will no longer be referred to as FOBs (Forward Operating Bases). They will be designated as camps." The following briefly annotates the primary Marine camps dotted around Al Anbar province.

1. Al Qa'im

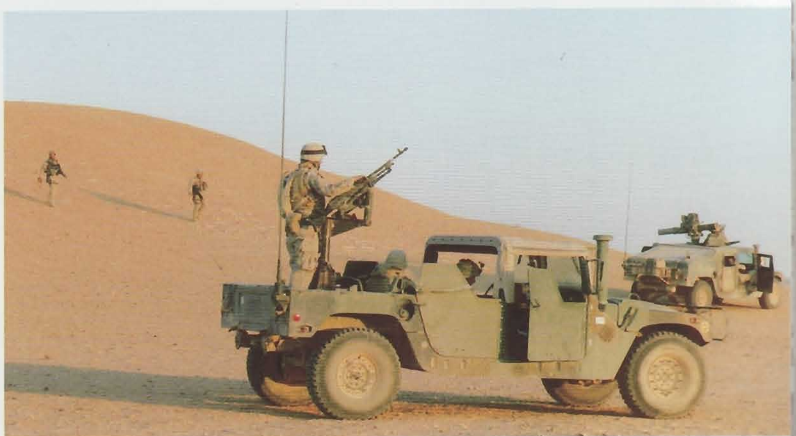
Al Qa'im (the Arabic means "firm, steadfast") is a border town just 1.5km from the Syrian border on the westernmost edge of Al Anbar province. Near to the town is Camp Al Qa'im, sited near the town's former rail yards. This base is vital in helping secure the very porous border between Iraq and Syria, with Marines giving support to ISF (Iraqi Security Forces) in protecting the frontier. The camp includes an asphalt road that doubles as a desert airstrip. Helicopters are regularly seen taking off and landing at this remote base as they perform CAS (Close Air Support), convoy escort, medevac, armed reconnaissance, and re-supply missions.

2. Al Asad (x3 principal bases)

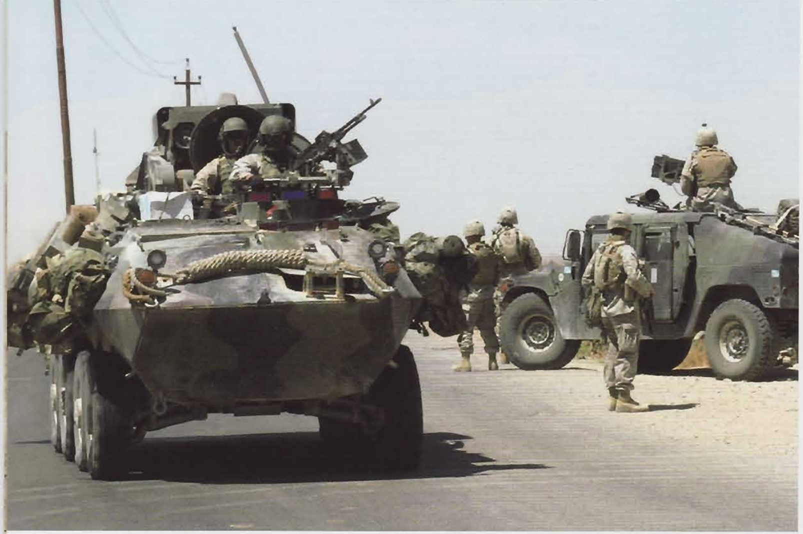
This was originally Iraq's second largest airbase, captured on 16 April 2003 by Australian SAS and commando forces. It is 180km west of Baghdad, encompassed by scrub and desert sand. The nearest town is Baghdadi, around 10km distant. The airfield has two main runways and plays host to approximately 17,000 troops. This massive facility is used extensively by the 3rd MAW for its fixed wing and rotary aircraft, including up to 120 helicopters. Runways have been upgraded, and the perimeter fence pushed out to improve security. It is set out like a new suburban subdivision and even has a couple of bus routes, which gives some indication of its enormous size. Al Asad Airbase gives support to smaller bases around Al Anbar province, with probably up to 75% of the military residents never required to leave the huge camp! Al Asad is the hub that connects the province with the USA, and at peak turnover times, up to 1200 troops per day may move through this vital airbase.

3. Habbaniyah

Habbaniyah is on the banks of the Euphrates River in central Iraq, around 80km west of Baghdad. Habbaniyah Airbase is just south of the main town, and is served by a single 2400m runway. Much of the airfield's infrastructure was originally built by the British in the 1930s when Habbaniyah was the British Empire's major base in Iraq (the RAF finally vacated it in May 1959). Before being renamed Camp Habbaniyah, the facility was known as Camp Manhattan.



Personnel of Weapons Company, 3/7 Marines, set up an OP (Observation Post) along the Syrian border to stem the inflow of smuggled equipment, weapons and insurgents over the extremely porous border with Syria. The nearest vehicle is a four-door M998 with a 7.62mm M240G fitted on a pedestal mount. The second vehicle is an M1046 TOW (Tube-launched Optically-tracked Wire-guided) Missile Carrier with Kevlar blankets added to its doors. (LCpl. Michael McMaugh, USMC)



An LAV-AT (Anti-Tank), armed with a twin TOW launcher, passes a checkpoint established by 2nd Platoon, Kilo Company, 3/7 Marines, on the streets of Karabilah in mid-June. The hull is festooned with crew gear and equipment, and the commander has an M240G mounted by his hatch on a Platt Swingmount. (LCpl. Michael McMaugh, USMC)

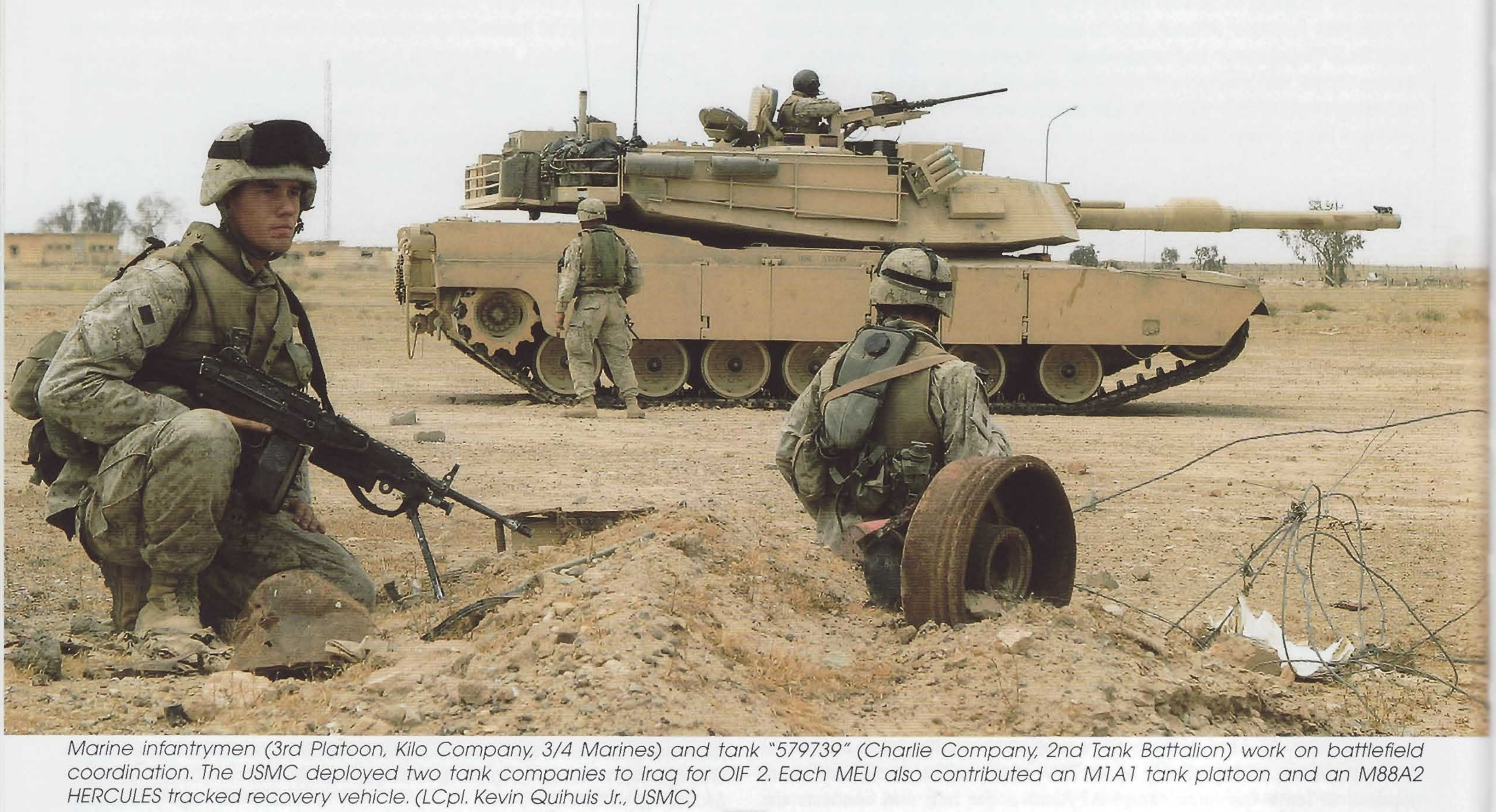
On 10 April, Marines of Alpha Company, 1/5 Marines, load up in their AAVs (Amphibious Assault Vehicles) for an attack on Fallujah that was soon to be aborted by the authorities. They wear Camelbaks – a convenient way of ensuring a sufficient water intake without combatants having to put down their weapons. Note the MARPAT desert digital combat uniforms. (Cpl. Matthew Apprendi, USMC)

4. Ar Ramadi (x2 principal bases)

Ar Ramadi is the capital of Al Anbar province, 110km west of Baghdad on the banks of the Euphrates River. This crowded, dingy city is one of the most dangerous places in all of Iraq for Coalition troops. The volatile city of 400,000 residents hosts two major Marine bases. The first is Camp Ramadi, home to a mixture of Marine, Seabee, Army and Air Force personnel. The camp is subjected to two or three rocket or mortar attacks per week on average. Camp Blue Diamond (named for the insignia of the 1st MarDiv) is located in the former palatial home of Saddam Hussein's half-brother. It served as the HQ for the 1st MarDiv during OIF 2, with the division's colors uncased at the base on 20 March 2004.

5. Fallujah (x2 principal bases)

The notorious city of Fallujah is located on the northern bank of the Euphrates River. It has 300,000 inhabitants and is one of the most violence-prone areas in the whole country. Camp Fallujah is a huge, sprawling base near this rebellious city. The moniker "Camp Fallujah" replaced that of FOB St. Mere, the name the 82nd Airborne Division christened it with. Camp Fallujah is the logistics hub for the heavy Marine presence in and around the city. Camp Baharia (formerly FOB Volturno) is the other main base. It takes its name from the Arabic word for the Marine Corps, *mushaat al-baharia* (literally "walkers of the navy" or "naval infantry"). This base is the closest to Fallujah, being situated approximately 3km southeast of the



Marine infantrymen (3rd Platoon, Kilo Company, 3/4 Marines) and tank "579739" (Charlie Company, 2nd Tank Battalion) work on battlefield coordination. The USMC deployed two tank companies to Iraq for OIF 2. Each MEU also contributed an M1A1 tank platoon and an M88A2 HERCULES tracked recovery vehicle. (LCpl. Kevin Quihuis Jr., USMC)

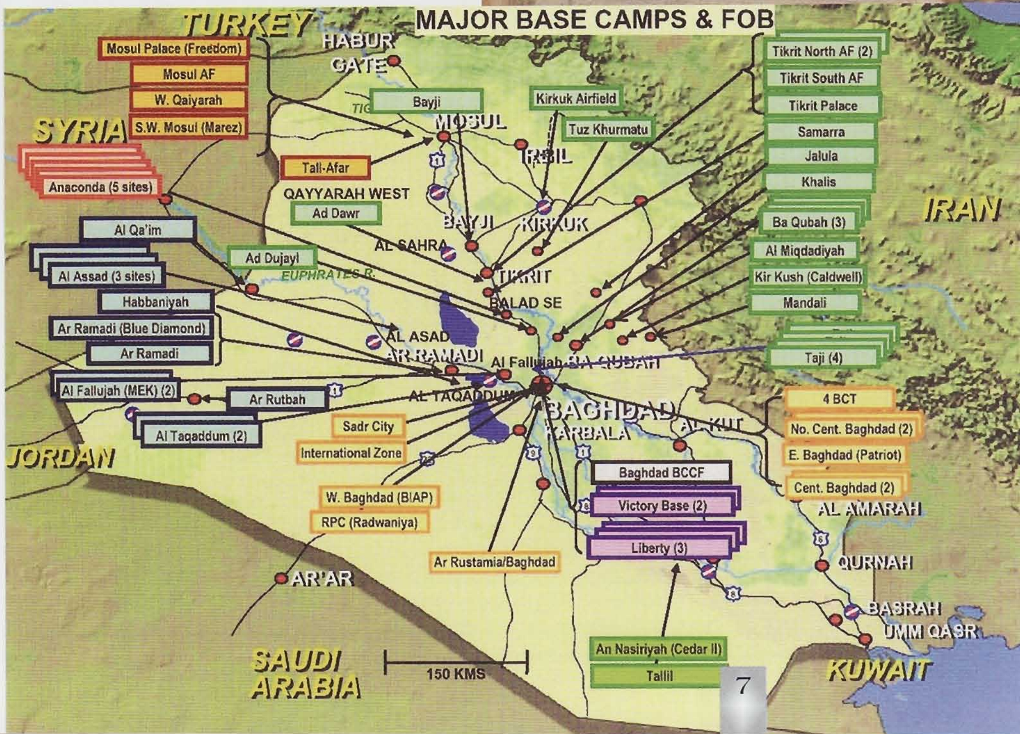
This team has been launching rounds from its M224 60mm mortar in the battle for Fallujah on 12 November. No bipod is attached so the crew is conducting handheld shooting using the trigger mechanism. Because of the intense shock created, only one propelling charge can be used in this firing mode. The men in this photo are all wearing IBA (Interceptor Body Armor) with groin protection. (LCpl. Daniel Klein, USMC)

city. It is sited on a former Ba'ath Party retreat known as "Dreamland," a scenic spot with palm trees and artificial lake frequented by Saddam Hussein's sons.

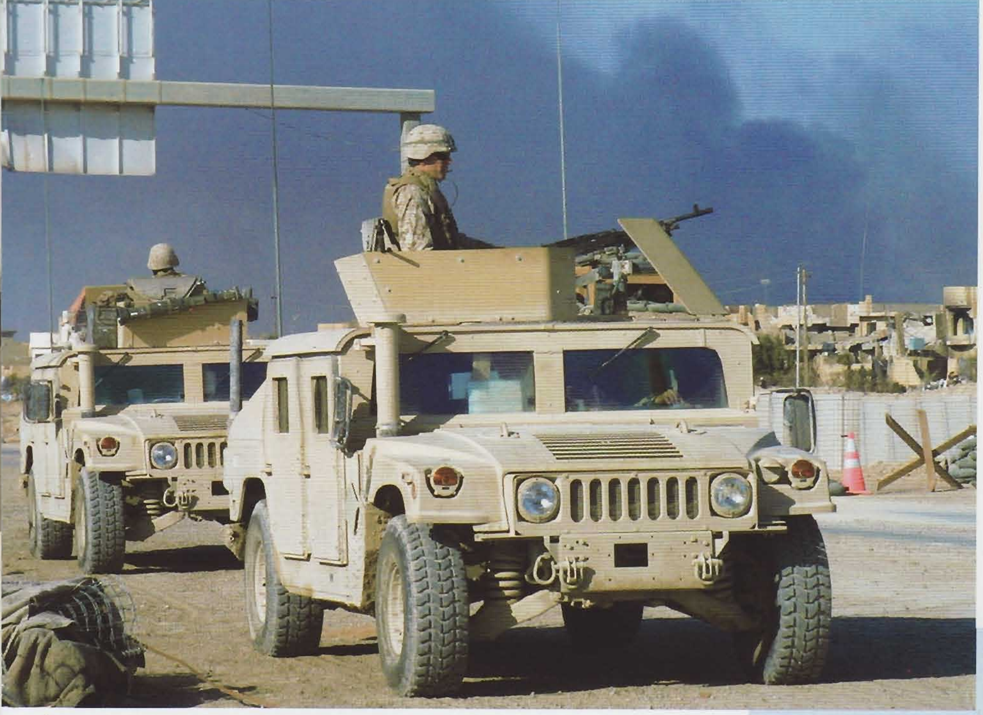
6. Ar Rutbah
The town of Ar Rutbah is an isolated outpost located near to the Iraq-Syria border in the western desert of Al Anbar province. It is 435km west of Baghdad, with Camp Korean Village (KV for short) based at a former Iraqi airbase approximately 24km from the town. It is named in honor of Korean construction laborers that worked on the four-lane highway leading to Baghdad. Camp KV is surrounded by miles of sand but it is important in supporting Iraqi forces that patrol the border with Syria and Jordan. A series of 32 forts was being built along Iraq's western borders, while Marines supervised Iraqi-manned border crossing points such as the one at Al Walid.

7. Al Taqaddum (x2 principal bases)
Al Taqaddum is a former Iraqi airbase 74km west of Baghdad. Camp Al Taqaddum is about 1.5km south of the Euphrates River and 1.5km northeast of Lake Habbaniyah. It has two runways, one 4000m and one 3700 feet in length. Formerly known as Camp Ridgeway, Marines renamed this key Marine airbase as Camp Al Taqaddum (commonly shortened to TQ).

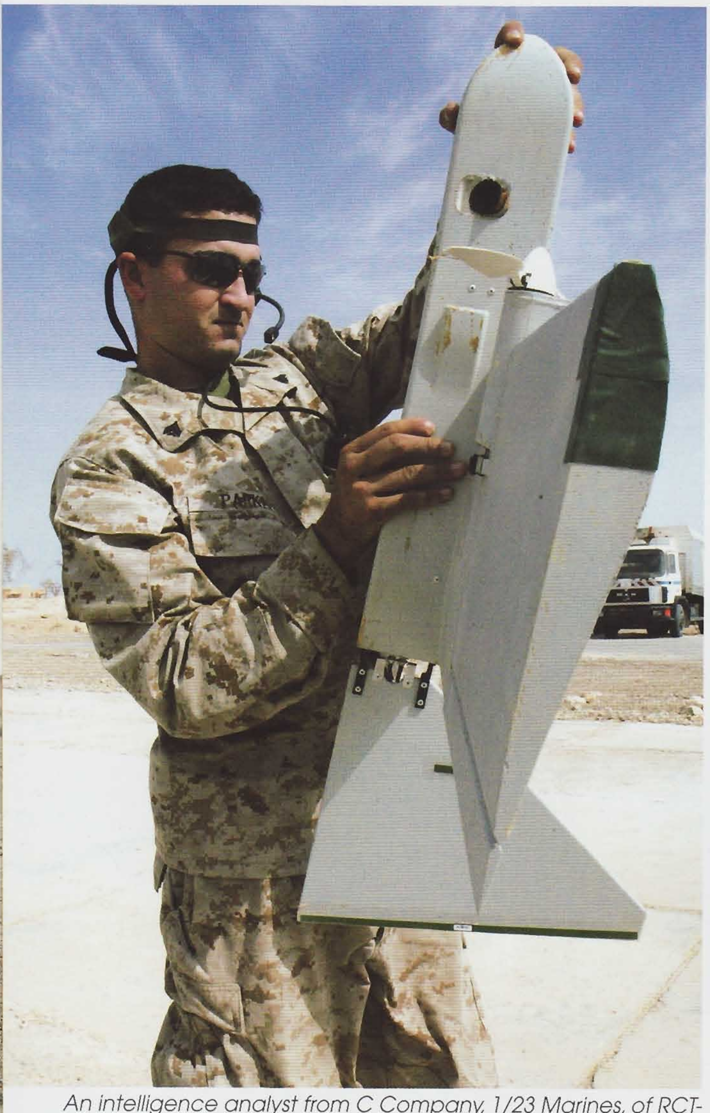
Marines orient their 40mm Mk.19 Mod.3 automatic grenade launchers in the direction of an insurgent threat on 11 December. These M1025 Humvee Armament Carriers belong to the CAAT (Combined Anti-Armor Team) Platoon, Weapons Company, of 3/5 Marines. Note the unglazed armored doors, typical of the armor suite fitted to USMC Humvees in the early stages of OIF 2. Also worthy of note is the curved turret armor with a painted Arabic warning to "Stay back!" (LCpl. James Vooris, USMC)


MAJOR BASE CAMPS & FOB
TURKEY
SYRIA
IRAN
JORDAN
SAUDI ARABIA
KUWAIT
HABUR GATE
MOSUL
IRBIL
KIRKUK
BAYJI
QAYYARAH WEST
AL SAHRA
TIKRIT
BALAD SE
AL ASAD
AR RAMADI
Al Fallujah
BA QUBAH
AL TAQADDUM
BAGHDAD
KARBALA
AL KUT
AL AMARAH
QURNAH
BASRAH
UMM QASR
AR'AR
EUPHRATES R.
TIG
150 KMS
Mosul Palace (Freedom)
Mosul AF
W. Qaiyarah
S.W. Mosul (Marez)
Anaconda (5 sites)
Tall-Afar
Bayji
Ad Dawr
Ad Dujayl
Al Qa'im
Al Assad (3 sites)
Habbaniyah
Ar Ramadi (Blue Diamond)
Ar Ramadi
Al Fallujah (MEK) (2)
Ar Rutbah
Al Taqaddum (2)
Sadr City
International Zone
W. Baghdad (BIAP)
RPC (Radwaniya)
Ar Rustamia/Baghdad
Kirkuk Airfield
Tuz Khurmatu
Tikrit North AF (2)
Tikrit South AF
Tikrit Palace
Samarra
Jalula
Khalis
Ba Qubah (3)
Al Miqdadiyah
Kir Kush (Caldwell)
Mandali
Taji (4)
4 BCT
No. Cent. Baghdad (2)
E. Baghdad (Patriot)
Cent. Baghdad (2)
Baghdad BCCF
Victory Base (2)
Liberty (3)
An Nasiriyah (Cedar II)
Tallil

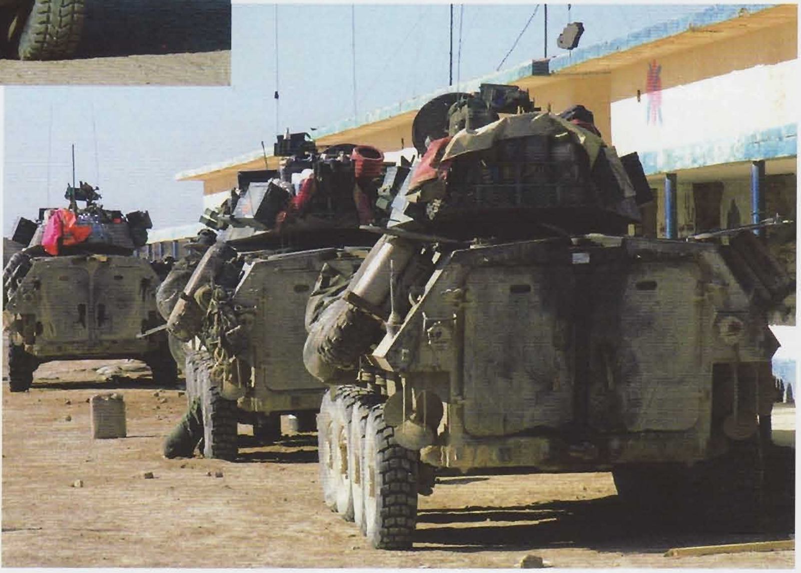
Major MNF-I camps and FOBs during OIF 2. The bases shown in light blue are those belonging to I MEF (Source: U.S. Department of Defense)



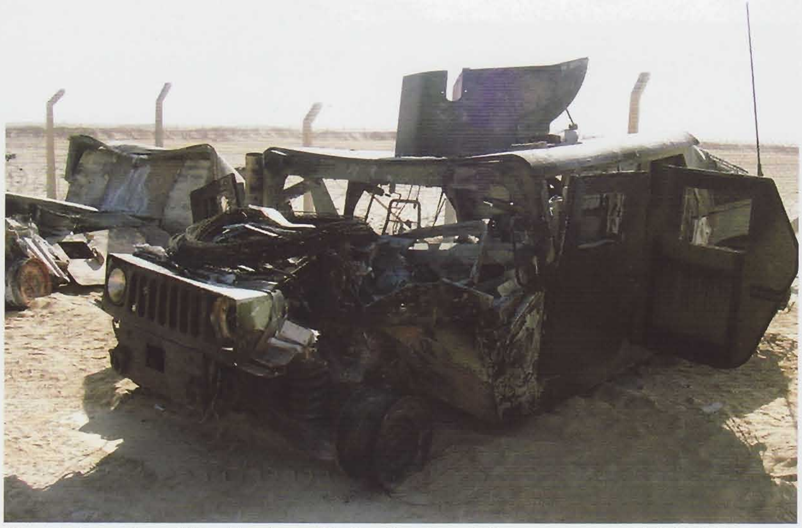
These M1114 up-armored Humvees of 1/3 Marines wait outside a Fallujah ECP (Entry Control Point) on 22 December after the conclusion of major combat. By now the better-protected M1114, powered by a 190hp 6.5-liter V8 turbocharged diesel engine, was in more abundant supply. These vehicles are fitted with the O'Gara-Hess & Eisenhard Gunner Shield Kit (in front of the M240 MG) and Gunner Protection Kit (providing upper body protection for the gunner). (LCpl. Jeremy Ferguson, USMC)



An intelligence analyst from C Company, 1/23 Marines, of RCT-7, performs preflight checks on a Dragon Eye. This 2.5kg miniature UAV (Unmanned Aerial Vehicle) will shortly be taking to the skies on a reconnaissance mission lasting up to 60 minutes while cruising at 65km/h. Operations in Iraq have seen UAV surveillance becoming commonplace at the lowest tactical level for the first time. It takes less than a week to train operators of this UAV. (Cpl. Randy Bernard, USMC)



This photo was taken in mid-December at Camp Owen. This trio of LAV-25s of the 1st LAR (Light Armored Reconnaissance) Battalion was attached to 1/8 Marines, and had been heavily involved in intense fighting in Fallujah. In evidence are brightly colored VS-17 aerial identification panels. (LCpl. Jeremy Ferguson, USMC)



The victim of an IED attack on 29 September, this up-armored M1114 Humvee from an MP detachment tells a tragic tale. Though the 4447kg M1114 has the highest degree of armor protection available on any Humvee, Marines remain vulnerable to IED attacks. Insurgents have been quick to adapt and adjust their techniques by using more powerful IEDs. (SSgt. Michael Barrett, USMC)

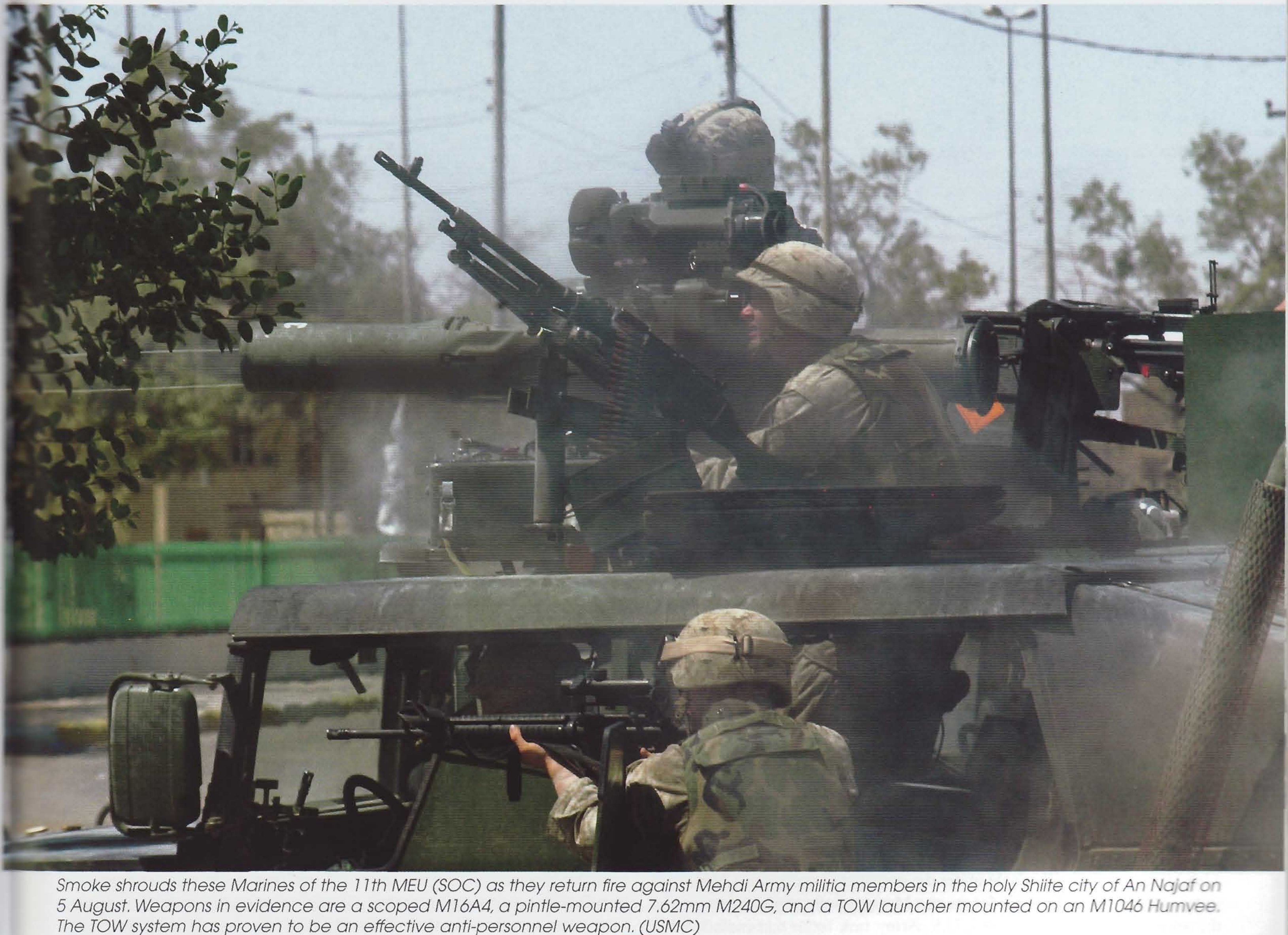
The Najaf Crisis

The holy Shiite city of An Najaf (population 585,600 in 2003) is located 160km south of Baghdad. The city contains the Imam Ali Mosque (also known as the Tomb of Ali), the fourth holiest Muslim site in the world and of particular importance to Shiites. This mosque was the last resting place of Imam Ali, son-in-law of Prophet Muhammad. Since Ali was also Muhammad's cousin, he is considered by Shiites to be the first legitimate caliph and the first imam.

The Najaf Crisis was precipitated by the Muslim cleric, Muqtada al-Sadr. Backed by his Islamist Mahdi Army, he was growing more and more obstreperous in the city. The radical al-Sadr had been preaching sedition and incendiary phlegm in the Sadr City slums of eastern Baghdad for more than a year. He was now intent on leading a revolt that would convulse Shiites throughout southern Iraq, thus opening the way for him to seize power ahead of the scheduled June handover of power to the new Iraqi government. As part of this coordinated insurrection, the Mahdi Army attacked the joint Spanish and El Salvadorian base in An Najaf on 4 April. On that occasion, 2-37 AR of the 1st Armored Division arrived in the city in the wake of the Spanish withdrawal, and fought pitched battles against hardliners of the Mahdi Army. Al-Sadr took up residence in and around the sacred Mosque of Ali, looting mosques and setting up illegal *Shariah* courts and prisons in the city.

After that, the pilgrimage city continued to simmer, exploding into flame again on 5 August. At 1:00a.m, followers of al-Sadr launched an unsuccessful attack against Najaf's central police station. Two hours later, the Mahdi Army assaulted the police station again, this time with heavier weaponry. ING (Iraqi National Guard) troops of the 405th Battalion, 50th Iraqi Brigade, were quickly on the scene to help repel this second assault. The governor of An Najaf province made a special request to the 11th MEU (SOC [Special Operations Capable]) for help, and General Casey, Commander of MNF-I (Multi-National Force – Iraq), responded immediately. This MEU had only taken up authority for the area less than a week before on 31 July, and a QRF (Quick Reaction Force) was sent into the city to cordon off al-Sadr's militia. By this time, militants had withdrawn into the city's exclusion zone and no shots were fired.

At 8:00am the same day, al-Sadr's militia forces assembled again in even larger numbers for a third assault on the police station, and the 11th MEU (SOC) was called back in. Marines helped the police and ING repulse the attack, and afterwards Muqtada's militia sought refuge in the neighboring Wadi as-Salam cemetery, an existing base of operations for them. The militia had weapon stashes there and they had already been using it as a base to launch attacks against ING troops in the city, as well as torturing kidnapped police and civilian victims. This cemetery is a rabbit warren of multi-story mausoleums, caves and tombs, a perfect place to find sanctuary. The area of the burial ground is 5km by 3km, and the militia took shelter there in contravention of a previously negotiated exclusion zone agreement.



Smoke shrouds these Marines of the 11th MEU (SOC) as they return fire against Mehdi Army militia members in the holy Shiite city of An Najaf on 5 August. Weapons in evidence are a scoped M16A4, a pintle-mounted 7.62mm M240G, and a TOW launcher mounted on an M1046 Humvee. The TOW system has proven to be an effective anti-personnel weapon. (USMC)

AL-HASNAA HOTEL

Cavernous AAV7A1s are being loaded with Marines from Alpha Company, BLT 1/4 of the 11th MEU (SOC). The unit commenced combat operations in An Najaf less than a week after taking over responsibility in the area. These "tracks" can carry up to 25 passengers but conditions are stifling and cramped when the vehicle is "buttoned" up, so the load is usually less. (Cpl. Annette Kyriakides, USMC)

At around 10:45am, Marines came under fire from 30 or so 120mm mortar shells fired from within this cemetery. An operation was quickly launched by BLT 1/4 (Battalion Landing Team) of the 11th MEU (SOC).

Fierce fighting raged in almost 50ºC temperatures for the next two days as BLT 1/4 slowly pushed into the vast graveyard complex, the largest in the Muslim world (and possibly the entire world). Marines were forced to dig out the enemy with heavy fire, and on the site where Imam Ali is supposed to be resurrected on Judgment Day, the enemy's death toll exceeded 300 militiamen. This was at the cost of four Marines killed. The BLT was supported by jets and helicopters that swept in over the cemetery, as well as by armored vehicles on the ground. Mahdi Army militiamen sniped, fired automatic weapons and mortared the "Grunts" within the massive complex. When the fighting finally subsided, the "Wadi of Peace" was left smoking, bullet-riddled and desecrated. Numerous weapon caches were found in the complex's myriad catacombs and mausoleums.

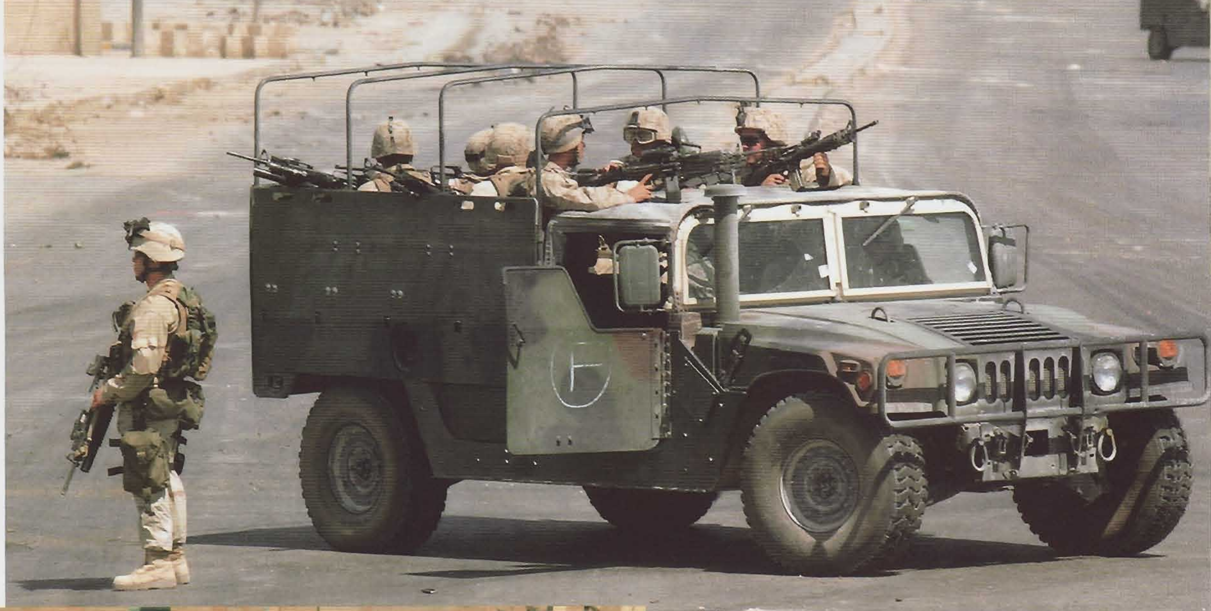
The 11th MEU (SOC) was locked in heavy fighting in the cemetery, but from 7 August onwards, it also began conducting raids against other hostile positions in the city of An Najaf. All across the city, Marines fought, with probably every Marine unit in the city either ambushed or fired on at some stage of the extensive operation. Militia members loyal to Muqtada al-Sadr were continuously pouring down small-arms fire, while snipers traded shots from windows high above the streets. In this urban combat, highly trained Marine counter-snipers proved very effective.

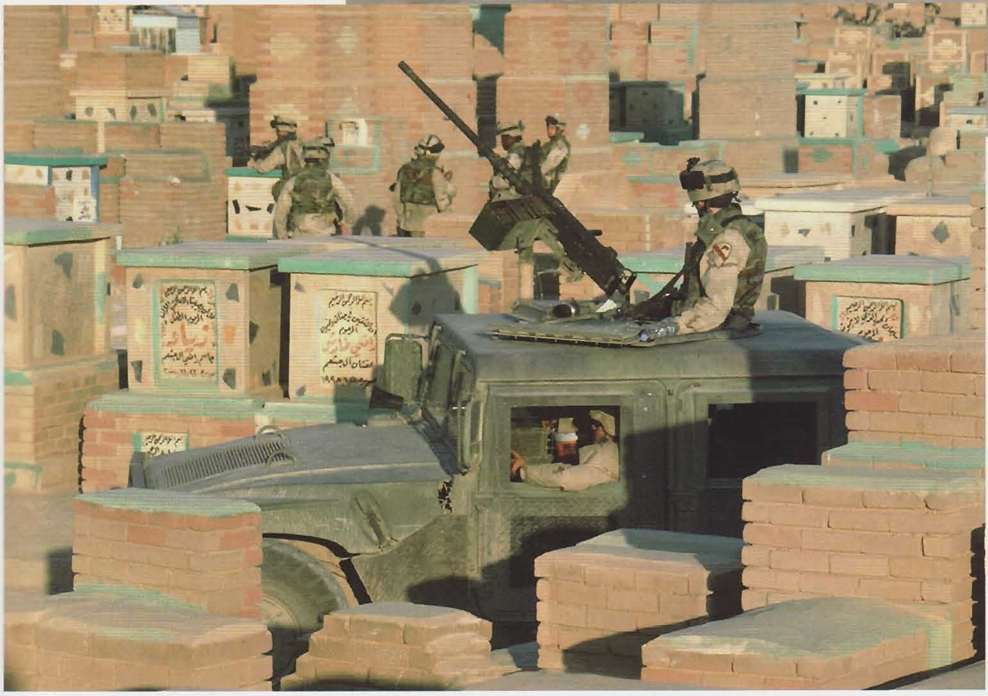
On 9 August, MNF-I ordered I MEF to assume responsibility for all military operations in the provinces of An Najaf and Al Qadisiyah. The 11th MEU (SOC) finally came under the operational control of I MEF, and in a nasty surprise for militia forces, the Marine contingent was boosted in the second week of August by a U.S. Army task force that included 1-5 CAV, 2-7 CAV, Alpha Company of 2-12 CAV, plus around 500 ING troops. These reinforcements enabled a cordon to be formed around the holy city. U.S. troops were soon launching an assault against the Wadi as-Salam cemetery, while 2-7 CAV pushed in from the east with its armor.

Combat with the Mahdi Army was fierce for the next week as clashes swept back and forth, mainly centered on the cemetery and southwestern portion of the city. The Mahdi Army's preferred tactic was to launch attacks from their redoubts before racing back to find sanctuary in mosques and other buildings adjacent to the Imam Ali Mosque. Though it was never a consideration for the militia, American forces were careful to avoid damaging such sacred sites. In the U.S. assaults, Abrams tanks and Bradley IFVs (Infantry Fighting Vehicles) were sent in first to draw out the enemy, before responding with fire from their main guns and spraying hostile positions with machine guns. Army and Marine tanks were subjected to fierce enemy small-arms, RPG and mortar fire, often for hours on end. Conditions were terrible inside the tanks, with claustrophobic and intense temperatures exacerbated by the choking fumes from the main gun rounds that were constantly being fired. Tank crewmen fought with IV needles inserted into their veins, and they had to be withdrawn every three hours to be re-hydrated with pints of IV liquid. Helicopters and fighter aircraft bombed and strafed enemy strongholds and rooftops.

The commander of the 11th MEU (SOC), Col. Anthony Haslam, stated on 11 August that, "Iraqi and U.S. forces are making final preparations as we get ready to finish this fight that the Muqtada militia started." The results were seen the following day as a joint Marine and ING raid targeted the Sadr neighborhood, a volatile area 3km east of the Imam Ali Shrine that was known to be the epicenter of resistance. It was replete with fortifications and weapon caches. The quarters of Muqtada al-Sadr were raided, as were two medical clinics that had been occupied by his militia.

This M1038 Humvee bristles with weapons of half a dozen Marines of Charlie Company, 1/4 BLT, 11th MEU (SOC). As pitched battles continue in the nearby Wadi as-Salam cemetery, this squad secures a road on 6 August, the day after al-Sadr's forces assaulted An Najaf's central police station. Note the ballistic windscreen fitted to the vehicle. (Cpl. Daniel Fosco, USMC)

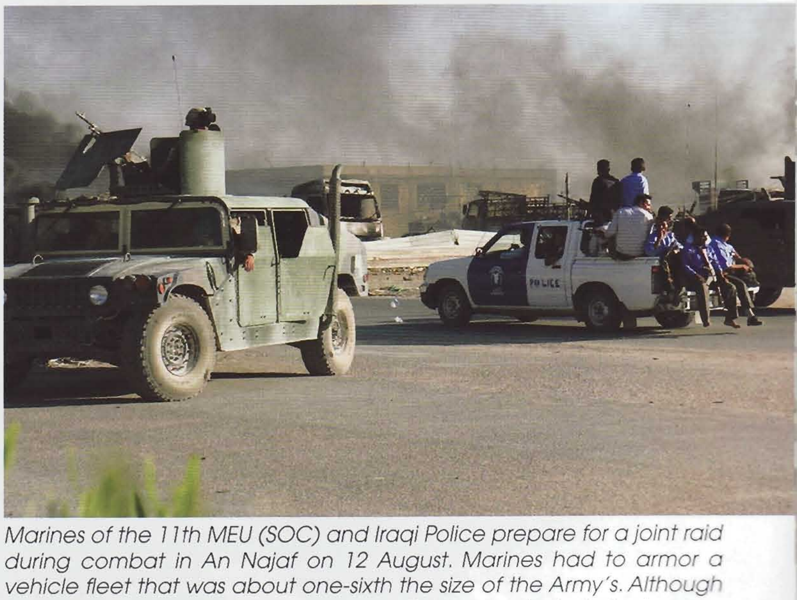




This photo of the Wadi as-Salam cemetery shows the type of terrain Marines and soldiers fought in. On 10 August, this Army M1025 Humvee of 1 CAV maneuvers its way through the myriad of mausoleums in the enormous burial site, searching for weapons caches. The soldier manning the unprotected .50-cal M2 HB has it in the "free gun" mode without the aid of a T&E (Traverse & Elevation) mechanism, a common practice at such close quarters. (Spc. Lester Colley, US Army)

The second week saw intense efforts to reach a peace agreement, with the Iraqi government, the UN, and Iraq's top Shiite cleric, the Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, all weighing in. Clashes continued unabated in the urban environment, however, marked by fragile truces that were just as quickly broken again. The Americans continued to pummel al-Sadr's militia forces as they tightened the noose around him. By 20 August, the defenders were down to their last stand near the grand Imam Ali Mosque and its gilded dome.

By 25 August, after three weeks of bitter combat against these Shiite zealots, U.S. and Iraqi forces had reached the city center and had fought their way to within 20m of the barricaded main gate of the Imam Ali Mosque. Faced with inevitable defeat and holed up in the mosque with supplies running low, Muqtada al-Sadr finally agreed to a peace settlement on 26 August that required all weapons to be removed from the city and for Coalition troops to be withdrawn. As part of the agreement, the police would again take over responsibility for the city's security. Operations in the city were officially ended when the 73-year-old cleric ceremonially handed over the keys to the Imam Ali Mosque on 27 August. The death toll in the bitter fighting included probably thousands of Najaf militiamen and civilians, as well as nine U.S. Marines and soldiers. Yet again, the firebrand al-Sadr had sparked a revolt, had lost a battle with America, but still remained at large. Yet again, political leaders had not allowed U.S. forces to capture al-Sadr or to finish off his militia, simply due to the political ramifications it might trigger in Iraq.



Marines of the 11th MEU (SOC) and Iraqi Police prepare for a joint raid during combat in An Najaf on 12 August. Marines had to armor a vehicle fleet that was about one-sixth the size of the Army's. Although the USMC wanted thicker armor, they concluded that some protection was better than none at all, and so they bolted on 3/16-inch steel plate as an interim solution. This armor was thin - while it might stop bullets, it could not withstand large roadside bombs. (Cpl. Dick Kotecki, USMC)

Fallujah, a city of 350,000 inhabitants prior to OIF, is situated in Al Anbar province just 69km west of Baghdad. Virtually untouched in the initial invasion of Iraq, its Iraqi Army garrison had abandoned its posts, leaving unsecured equipment to fall into the hands of whoever wanted it. Although the city was initially peaceful, this urban backwater quickly fell under the sway of the Sunni Triangle and was soon renowned for its violent and bloody attacks. Only 3km wide and 3.5km long, this city is laid out in a grid pattern of wide boulevards that separate crowded blocks of low-rise residences. It has been described as a wild frontier town filled with outlaws, criminals, strong-arm Ba'athists, ambitious imams, and tribal allegiances. Fallujah has been under the jurisdiction of the USMC ever since the 1/505th Parachute Infantry Regiment of the 82nd Airborne Division handed over responsibility in the last week of March 2004. After seeing 94 of his paratroopers killed in their seven-month tenure in Fallujah, commander LtCol. Drinkwater passed the baton to the Marines with the prophetic words, "I think the Marines will enjoy working in Fallujah. But they'll be bloodied."

The city is also known as the "City of Mosques," referring to the deeply religious Muslim heritage of the city. In fact, most of the residents follow the Wahabi sect of Sunni Islam, with approximately 200 or so mosques in the city and neighboring villages. Fallujah is adjacent to a bend in the Euphrates River, and is cut in half by the six lanes of Highway 10, the main road connecting Baghdad with the Jordanian border. During the Marines' deployment in OIF 2, there were two major operations centered on the city of Fallujah. The First Battle of Fallujah went under the name of Operation Vigilant Resolve, and the Second Battle was known as Operation al Fajr.

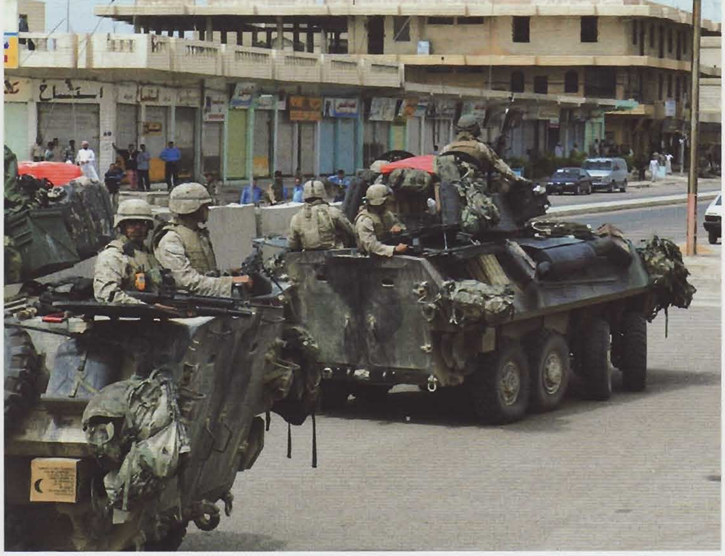
Operation Vigilant Resolve (April 2004)

On 31 March 2004, four American contractors from Blackwater Security Consulting decided to take a 20-minute shortcut through Fallujah. Instead, their two Pajero vehicles were ambushed by insurgents and riddled with bullets. The bodies of the American contractors were mutilated and set on fire, with two of the charred corpses then being dragged behind a car before being grotesquely strung up from the steel trestles of Fallujah's 'Brooklyn Bridge'. It was this macabre incident that caused shockwaves and outrage all the way up to the innermost corridors of the White House. Such an appalling episode would not go unanswered, and Marines were itching to bring the culprits to justice.

On 2 April, I MEF received written orders permitting offensive operations against the city's troublemakers. This pacification operation commenced 4 April with the city being surrounded and sealed off. Marines were supposed to be joined by the ING, but on the dawn of the invasion most discarded their uniforms and deserted. It was estimated that at the time, active insurgents in Fallujah included 500 hardliners and 1000 part-time fighters. This was within a population that included 70,000 unemployed males, any one of which would probably have gladly joined the resistance.

Insurgents occupied the city north of Highway 10, as well as to the west of Phase Line Violet (a reference line running north-south midway through the city). The city of Fallujah was to be squeezed by a main effort from the south and east by 1/5 Marines, and from the northwest by 2/1 Marines. The intent was to attack block by block, overcoming strong points, demolishing arms caches and wiping out any who resisted. By 8 April, the seasoned 3/4

As part of the initial isolation of Fallujah in Operation Vigilant Resolve, these Marines of 2/1 Battalion block the six lanes of Highway 10 leading into the violent "viper's nest" of Fallujah on 5 April. An M1045 Humvee with a TOW launcher is evident on the left. The TOW operator is using the weapon's high-powered optical sights to observe the city. (MSgt. Howard Farrell, USMC)



LAV-25s pause during a patrol of Fallujah, with Marines on watch standing in the large double roof hatches. The turret of the LAV-25 is fitted with a 25mm M242 Bushmaster cannon (with 210 ready rounds) and an M240G 7.62mm coaxial MG (with 200 ready rounds and 800 stowed rounds), and eight smoke grenade launchers (with eight rounds ready and eight stowed). (USMC)

Marines of 1st Platoon, Echo Company, 2/1 Battalion, look through a hole in a parapet in early April as a pair of Abrams from the 1st Tank Battalion lays waste to buildings sheltering Iraqi snipers. As a result of combat experience in OIF, crews have requested that the TC's (Tank Commander's) .50-cal M2 has a larger ready ammunition supply than the current 100-round ammo container. (Sgt. Jose Guillen, USMC)

Marine Battalion was also joining the fray from the northeast, acting as a net to catch the insurgents being pushed from the east. The city was essentially divided into four quadrants with a Marine battalion assigned to each sector. Another three battalions provided an outer cordon. The main ground units involved in the fighting were:

- 2/1 Marines (northwest)
- 3/4 Marines with two tanks (northeast)
- 1/5 Marines with six tanks (southeast)
- 2/2 Marines with four tanks (southwest)

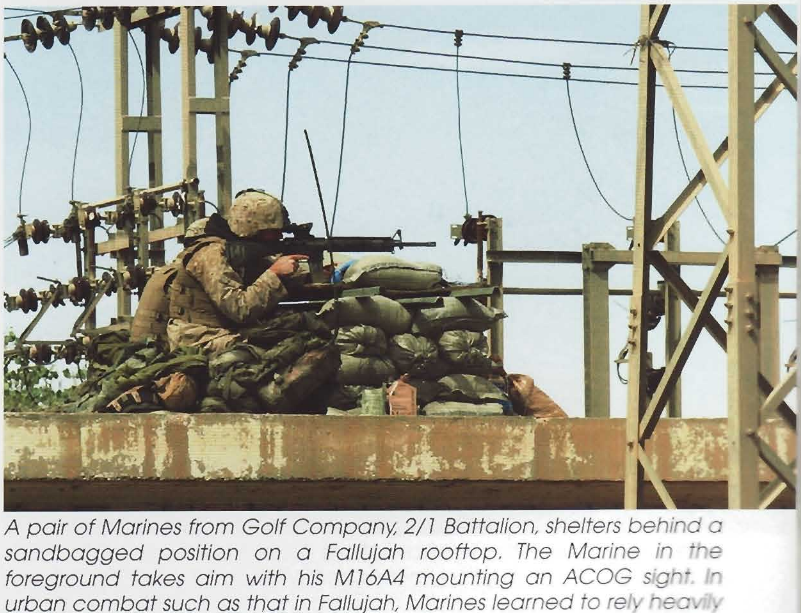
These ground forces were backed up by air support in the form of AC-130 gunships at night, and F-15s and Super Cobra helicopters by day, although the Cobras were restricted by their greater vulnerability to ground fire. HMM-161 (Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron) provided casualty evacuation for the duration of Operation Vigilant Resolve.

The normal pattern of combat was for Marines to isolate crossroads with the aid of tanks, and then clear areas a block at a time. Fallujah is comprised of two-story concrete houses hidden behind courtyard walls, and separated by squalid alleyways. Dressed mostly in t-shirts and trousers, and with sandals or running shoes on their feet, insurgents favored the tactic of fighting from strong points or making sudden attacks with small groups of a dozen members on foot or in vehicles. They rigged a great many houses with booby traps and frequently employed IEDs (Improvised Explosive Devices). A typical insurgent might expose himself only half a dozen times each day to fire on Marines, before going to ground and melting away again. The use of Soviet-style defense-in-depth tactics suggested that former Iraqi Army members, who were schooled in such methodologies, were orchestrating the resistance.

It was estimated there were only about 25 or so hardcore insurgent groups, each armed with around two dozen members. These fanatical groups were heavily armed with RPGs (Rocket-Propelled Grenades), machine guns, mortars, IEDs, and sometimes anti-aircraft weapons. These militants were often aided by Iraqi policemen who supplied them with ammunition, or by Red Crescent ambulances that delivered weapons and munitions before taking away bodies. The insurgents seemed content to send waves of attackers against the Marines, uncaring over how many died and entered paradise in each assault. Faced with such tactics, Marines relied heavily on snipers and mortars, as well as their automatic weapons.

There was a lack of uniformity in town maps and grid references, meaning there were continual fears of blue-on-blue (friendly fire) incidents. Marine platoons were reinforced to company strength for much of the time. By the evening of 8 April, it was estimated only another 48-72 hours were needed to conclude the battle. The Marines could sense victory in an operation that was being mounted under the spotlight of the world's media. This factor would later be decisive in bringing Operation Vigilant Resolve to a premature conclusion.

In conjunction with Operation Vigilant Response, I MEF widened operations on 6 April to include several other hotbed cities known to be harboring insurgents. In fact, fighting was erupting across Al Anbar province on this day with Ar Ramadi at the epicenter. America was clearly being challenged to a stand-up fight. Subsequent Coalition operations ranged from the Syrian border all the way to the Baghdad suburbs, and they netted a significant number of insurgents and fighters. In the western Husaybah and Al Qa'im regions, missions were aimed at stopping the influx of foreign fighters, money and materials. A simultaneous operation was conducted by 2/4 Marines in Ar Ramadi to counter a massive offensive launched by hardcore insurgents. Actually, the fighting in Ar Ramadi on 6 April was heavier than that in Fallujah, with 12 Marines losing their lives. Eventually, the planned insurgent offensive in the provincial capital was headed off and the situation was prevented from spiraling out of control. In all, 2/4 Marines lost 16 dead, as well as more than 100 wounded in five days of fighting in Ar Ramadi.



A pair of Marines from Golf Company, 2/1 Battalion, shelters behind a sandbagged position on a Fallujah rooftop. The Marine in the foreground takes aim with his M16A4 mounting an ACOG sight. In urban combat such as that in Fallujah, Marines learned to rely heavily on snipers positioned on rooftops. Snipers were able to act as FOs (Forward Observers) covering the axis of roads. (USMC)

Supported by MGs and a 40mm Mk.19 Mod.3 automatic grenade launcher mounted on a two-door M998 Humvee, Marines of A Company, 1/5 Battalion, are heavily engaged in a firefight with insurgents in Fallujah on 7 April. This Humvee with makeshift armor appears to be a hand-me-down from an Army unit. (Cpl. Matthew Apprendi, USMC)

Elements of a joint 3/4 Marines patrol prepare to move out from Kharma on 27 April in an attempt to stabilize Fallujah. Their vehicles are M1044 Humvee Armament Carriers and the lead vehicle has a 40mm Mk.19 automatic grenade launcher fitted. (LCpl. Kevin Quihuis Jr., USMC)

Heated combat was continuing apace in Fallujah, primarily in the southern industrial district and northwest suburb of Jolan. By this time, Marines had gained control of around half of Fallujah. Meanwhile, politicians as far away as Baghdad, Washington and London were feeling the heat. The fighting had struck a raw nerve and triggered a near revolt in the ranks of the Iraqi Governing Council. At midday on 9 April, to head off this "perfect political storm," Marine operations in Fallujah were unilaterally suspended to allow meetings between the Iraqi government, the leaders of Fallujah, and the leaders of the anti-Coalition militia. This ceasefire allowed Iraqi authorities to bring in essential supplies to the city, and similarly allowed 70,000 Fallujah residents to leave the city to seek treatment for their wounded or to bury their dead. It also afforded insurgents opportunities to probe the fixed defensive lines being set up by Marines, and to continue their hit-and-run attacks or ambushes against regular patrols wherever they could. Marines kept up the siege of the city, and skirmishes with insurgents remained commonplace. For example, sniper teams were operating on the roof of every fourth or so house occupied by Marines, killing 10-20 insurgents per day.

Operation Vigilant Resolve was strategically flawed, not by the Marines who fought it, but by the politicians. The authorities ordered the attack, called it off, and then wavered indecisively. Confusing orders and directives were coming from every direction, and the Marines were champing at the bit, not being allowed to finish the job they had begun. Ensuing political negotiations brought Operation Vigilant Resolve to an end with written orders unilaterally halting the offensive being issued on 10 April. On 19 April, plans were set in motion to commence joint U.S.-Iraqi patrols, but these proposals soon fizzled out.

With weapons pointing in all directions, these Marines of 2/2 Battalion patrol through Fallujah in Humvees and LAVs on 15 June. This marked the first patrol in the town for more than a month. Despite the steel plates added to the open-backed Humvees, the occupants remain dangerously exposed to attacks. (Cpl. Shawn Rhodes, USMC)

On 26 April, fierce fighting again erupted when a dismounted detachment of Echo Company, 2/1 Marines, conducted a dawn patrol along the northwestern edge of Jolan District. They were ambushed as they rested in two houses, a sudden hail of RPG and small-arms fire pelting down on them. A string of taxis and pickups were being used to ferry insurgents to the frontlines where the patrol was pinned down. Finally, with Cobra helicopter and M1A1 tank support, the patrol members were able to beat a retreat. By noon it was over, with one dead and 17 of the 39 patrol members wounded.

In the April fighting, the USA carried out 150 air strikes, dropped 100 tons of ordnance, and destroyed 75 buildings and two mosques. An estimated 615 Iraqis were killed, as were 120 U.S. troops, during this First Battle of Fallujah. After all negotiations had failed and an impasse had been reached, talks authorized the setting up of an Iraqi force to maintain control over the town. The Coalition, who would remain outside the city under the deal, would provide this Fallujah Brigade with arms and money in exchange for a ceasefire. With half of the Blue Diamond Division (four battalions) tied up in Fallujah, and with politicians unwilling to give the order to initiate a final push, LtGen. Conway had little choice but to accept this proposal, even though the Marines balked at it, calling it "a deal with the devil." The 1000 Sunni members of the Fallujah Brigade were led by former officers of Saddam Hussein's army, specifically MajGen. Muhammad Latif, and his deputy, MajGen. Jasim Saleh. Despite its name, the Fallujah Brigade was far from being a proper military formation.

On 30 April, the fledgling brigade formed up outside Fallujah for its investiture of authority. Thereafter, the city "belonged" to the Fallujah Brigade. The pullout of Marines was an occasion of great celebration amongst emboldened Fallujah inhabitants who saw it as a victory over America's toughest soldiers. *Jihadists*, insurgents, gangs, neighborhood militias, and the Fallujah Brigade alike, set up checkpoints and conducted patrols. When questioned, they explained that in Fallujah everyone was a *mujahedeen*! Kidnappings, beheadings, car bombings, executions and bloody gang rule became the order of the day as the composition of the city shifted. Before, Fallujah had been dominated by secular, nationalist and Ba'athist groups, but now it veered towards warlords and Wahabi extremists, stiffened by a trickle of foreign fighters.

In late August, MajGen. Mattis was promoted to three stars and left Iraq, as did LtGen. Conway not long after. The combat battalions of the 1st MarDiv that had fought in Operation Vigilant Resolve were due to leave in

A member of India Company, 3/5 Marines, prepares to fire his M203 grenade launcher on insurgents skulking in the city outskirts after they opened fire with MGs and RPGs. Note the weapon's front leaf sight has been flipped up. This weapon has a maximum effective range of 350m for an area target. (LCpl. James Vooris, USMC)

September as their seven-month rotations concluded. By now, Marines were referring to Fallujah as "the bomb factory." They maintained a defensive cordon around the city but were regularly losing men. On 7 September, seven Marines of Fox Company, 2/1 Marines, were killed when a suicide bomber drove into their convoy. The marginalized Fallujah Brigade stood by, unable or unwilling to resist. In late July, MajGen. Latif left the city after losing total control.

Operation al-Fajr (Operation Phantom Fury) (November 2004)

Predictably, the Fallujah Brigade failed in its allotted task of creating stability, and the city swiftly become a redoubt for insurgents who plotted and engaged in violence without any fear of interference. The press variously described the city as "a nest of vipers" and "*mujahedeen* fiefdoms" – without doubt it was the worst place in Iraq, a "no go" area for the Coalition. The "City of Mosques" was also presumed to be the headquarters of terrorist leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. As Iraq headed towards national elections in January 2005, Fallujah's growing strength and threat as a terrorist base led the Iraqi government and Coalition military leaders to order a second round of operations. By September the realization had come that the city needed to be subjugated - the city had become a safe haven for insurgent attacks in places as far away as Baghdad.

On 9 August, LtCol. Suleiman, commander of the Iraqi battalion in Fallujah (a reliable Iraqi trusted by the Americans), was kidnapped, tortured and killed. At the time, MajGen. Mattis summed up the resolve of the Marines: "There's only one way to disarm the Fallujah Brigade. Kill it." Even as tanks rolled up outside the southern suburb of "Queens," insurgents rushed to the earth berm surrounding the city to engage them. The Marine division was straining at the leash, and though they were ordered to "keep the noise down," Fallujah's die had been cast. The Interim Iraqi Government sought to negotiate with Fallujah authorities to expel militia forces sheltering in the city, but this came to nothing. Prime Minister Allawi formally disbanded the Fallujah Brigade, stating "It was a wrong concept." With the intensity ratcheting up, the stage was set for The Second Battle of Fallujah to "clean it out." In late October, nine Marines from 1/3 Battalion were killed by a suicide bomber, which served to further stoke the fires of resolve.

Initially coined Operation Phantom Fury, this operation was soon relabeled Operation al-Fajr (Arabic for "The Dawn") by the Iraqi Defense Minister. Prime Minister Allawi authorized the attack just four days after George W. Bush was re-elected as president, with the aim of recapturing Fallujah from the control of anti-Iraqi forces. In combat preparations the city was sealed off and only civilians were allowed to leave. It is not known how many civilians remained in the city, but even if U.S. claims that 70-90% of the inhabitants had fled, this still left thousands of residents in the city. It was estimated the population had plummeted from 280,000 to 30,000, as both U.S. and Iraqi officials warned of impending action against the city. Electricity supplies were also cut off a few days before the attack to induce remaining residents to leave. Even as fearful inhabitants were fleeing the city, a steady flow of foreign fighters was being directed in.

This powerful M1A1 tank closes in on Fallujah in response to a mortar attack on 14 August. Besides the EAPU (External Auxiliary Power Unit) in the turret bustle rack and an ice cooler on the turret roof, there is a lot of crated MG ammo on hand in the BRE (Bustle Rack Extension). The TC also has an M16A2 available up top for close-in work or when dismounting. (USMC)

Up to 15,000 U.S. and Iraqi personnel[1] were involved in the assault, following days of sustained precision bombardments by American planes and artillery. The commander of I MEF was LtGen. John F. Sattler, who had taken over the job in September. The 1st MarDiv commander was MajGen. Richard F. Natonski. The attack involved a mix of six U.S. Marine and three U.S. Army battalions under the overall command of I MEF. A total of 12,000 troops would be fighting as a composite division during the battle:

RCT-1 with:
- 3/1 Marines
- 3/5 Marines
- 2-7 CAV (Army)
- 36th Commando Battalion (Iraqi)
- 1st Battalion, 1st Brigade, Iraqi Intervention Force
- 4th Battalion, 1st Brigade, Iraqi Intervention Force

RCT-7 with:
- 1/8 Marines
- BLT 1/3 (from the 31st MEU)
- 2-2 Infantry (Army)
- 2nd Brigade "Black Jack Brigade," 1 CAV (Army)
- 2nd Battalion, 1st Brigade, Iraqi Intervention Force
- 5th Battalion, 3rd Brigade, Iraqi Intervention Force
- 6th Battalion, 3rd Brigade, Iraqi Intervention Force

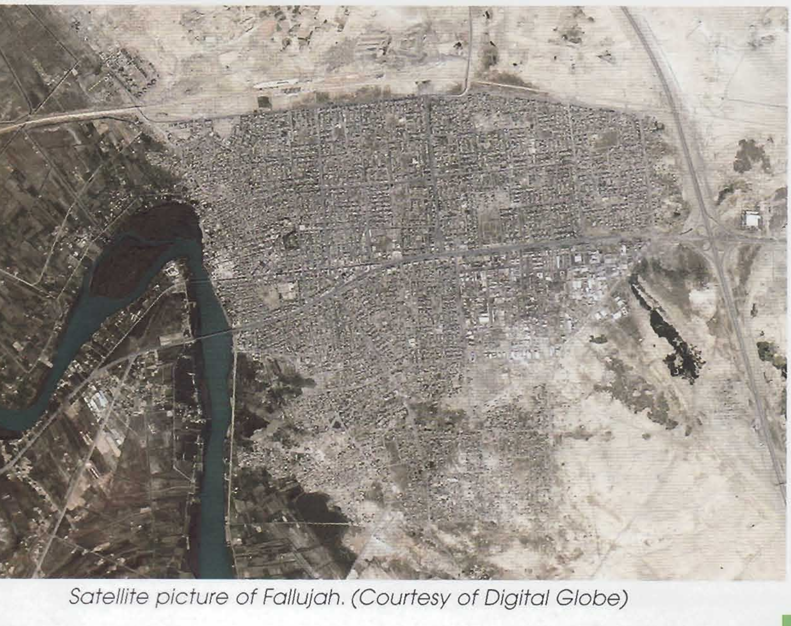
The Iraqi battalions were an important part of the plan. The Iraqis had been undependable in April, but more was expected of the Iraqi Intervention Force this time around with a battalion of about 400 Iraqis attached to each American regiment. Since they were untrained for urban combat, they trailed the lead American units. Though led by I MEF, this was a tight joint operation between the Marines, the Army, Seabees, air assets, and the Iraqi Intervention Force. They were attempting a high-intensity assault in an urban environment, something that requires careful coordination. The attack was better planned at the strategic level than the one in April - this time round there would be no hesitation and no ceasefire. The U.S. Army cordon around 'The City of Mosques' was provided principally by the 2nd BCT "Black Jack Brigade," 1 CAV. They were to prevent insurgents escaping from the city and dispersing to other areas. A British battalion from Basra, the Black Watch Battalion, was also dispatched to guard the highway outside Fallujah in order to free up a further Marine battalion for the attack.

---

1. Plans called for approximately 2000 Iraqi soldiers to be involved in Operation al-Fajr, but Gen. George W. Casey Jr., the top American commander in Iraq, revealed that a number of these never turned up, so numbers are not known exactly. Question marks were later raised over the effectiveness and reliability of some of these Iraqi forces, with desertions reported.

A 155mm M198 howitzer of M Battery, 4/14 Marines, provides supporting fires at Camp Fallujah on 21 October. Two members of the ammo team ram home a 155mm HE shell, while the two Marines on the far left hold the powder charges that will be inserted next. The A-gunner (assistant gunner) stands on the right, while the gunner is seated at the M137 Panoramic Telescope ("pantel") on the left. (LCpl. Daniel Klein, USMC)

The city of Fallujah has 39,000 buildings, and 400,000 rooms, any one of which could harbor insurgents as they waited hidden in order to negate the Coalition's overwhelming superiority in firepower. This time the assault would come from an unexpected direction - from the north. A stake would be jabbed directly into the heart of the defenses that were focused in the north of the city. The plan revolved around two Army armored battalions charging into the city from the north in order to take control of the main arteries, and for four Marine infantry battalions to follow along to clear buildings. RCT-1 would run some early feints from the south to keep the defenders guessing, while RCT-7 attacking from the northeast would provide the initial main effort. RCT-1 would then join RCT-7 in the north across a 5km front. Once the city north of Highway 10 was cleared, the assault could continue into the southern suburbs.



Satellite picture of Fallujah. (Courtesy of Digital Globe)

As the assault was launched, it was estimated that 2000-3000 insurgents were dug in within the city in approximately 210 defensive positions protected by IEDs and explosive daisy chains. Insurgents had had months to prepare their trenches, road barricades, berms with RPG revetments, and to lay mines. They were well dug in, even having tunnel networks under the city! These tunnels served as escape routes to fallback positions, as well as conduits for delivering weapons and ammunition from one side of the city to the other. Often their entrances were located in mosques and schools. According to international law, sites such as mosques are granted a protected status unless they are being used for military purposes, which was usually the case in Fallujah. It is estimated 1000 of these defenders were hardcore and 2000 were part-time fighters. They operated in groups of four to twenty men, each unit having a leader and a spiritual advisor. Their daily training consisted of watching videos of attacks on the Coalition, reading the Koran, and weapons training. Iraqi forces, rather than American, were used to search mosques after they had been captured. The suburb of Jolan and the Maqady Mosque in the north of Fallujah were the city's command center and defensive hub.

Operation al-Fajr, the major assault on Fallujah, began on 7 November. Just hours before the operation begins, Marines of India Company of 3/5 Battalion ready themselves. This picture shows AAVs lined up at Camp Baharia, the closest U.S. base to Fallujah. The other main base near the city is Camp Fallujah, the command center of I MEF and RCT-1 during the operation. (USMC)

7 November: Operation al-Fajr kicked off at dusk with an initial movement spearheaded by 2-7 CAV along the peninsula formed by the Euphrates River to the southwest of the city. The Iraqi 36th Commando Battalion, supported by U.S. Special Forces advisors and the 3rd LAR Battalion, surrounded the Fallujah General Hospital as darkness fell. After its seizure, the hospital was left in the care of Iraqi forces to provide ongoing medical services to injured residents. This initial diversionary move allowed American forces to set up a blocking force south of the city and to secure the two bridges that link the peninsular with the city proper. This movement was also supported by an attack from the southeast, creating an anvil against which insurgents would be forced as the ensuing main attack smashed down from the north.

Units now proceeded to attack positions a few kilometers north of the city's railroad tracks. Following heavy bombardments by tanks, artillery, mortars and aircraft, the main assault began after dark at 1900 hours. Intermittent rain was falling and a cold wind was gusting from the east. The attack kicked off at night because the attackers' greatest vulnerability was enemy fire against the massed units at the LOD (Line of Departure). Furthermore, the insurgents had no concentrated visibility in the hours of darkness, so they could not reply with an aimed barrage of rocket and mortar fire.

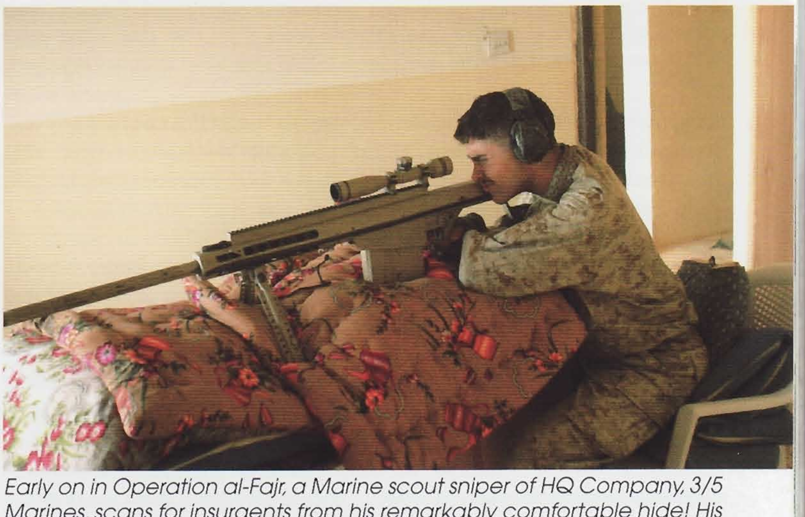
8 November: Six battalions sliced through three cuts in the northern berm on a broad 5km front. It was led by armored vehicles of 2-7 CAV. They burst south, capturing the main railway station by dawn, and struck on into Jolan district. This opened the way for following Marine and Iraqi units. A favorite tactic employed by militia forces was to hide and then reappear to attack Coalition forces in random, fierce CQB (Close Quarter Battles), sometimes resorting to suicide bombers. Insurgents enjoyed relative ease of movement around the city, able to reinforce any areas that were being assaulted. There were two kinds of enemy – the *jihadists* hiding in back rooms who were prepared to martyr themselves, and the Main Guard who had more military training and conducted a more mobile defense. To counter accurate enemy fire, Marines often called in friendly mortar and artillery fire just 200-400m ahead of their own positions. The northwestern suburb of Jolan was taken against less resistance than expected, and U.S. troops entered Hay Naib al-Dubat and al-Niziza districts by the afternoon.

9 November: On Day One, most battalions were not searching every house as they had geographical objectives to reach. The insurgents were already on the run, a fact that was recognized by MajGen. Natonski. Only one of the ten fighting battalions had been assigned the mission of clearing the area building by building. That battalion was 3/5 Marines, commanded by LtCol. Pat Malay. Other battalions had pushed quickly through, wiping only the dirtiest spots, while 3/5 would provide a more thorough scrub.

Shortly after nightfall, the heart of the city and Highway 10 were reached by the American assault force. Tanks provided supporting fire for dismounted Marines, firing hundreds of main gun rounds at targets or enemy strongholds. Some tankers were under sustained enemy mortar and

The opening day of combat – 7 November. Three crewmembers of Weapons Company, 1/8 Marines, have set up their M252 81mm mortar in a support position outside the city. Personal weapons include an M249 SAW and an M16A4 with M203 grenade launcher. Nighttime on the 7th did not bring much respite from combat, as Marines set up platoon defenses in houses and shivered from the cold. (LCpl. Trevor Gift, USMC)

The gun tube of a 155mm M198 towed howitzer points skyward towards the hornets' nest of Fallujah. Howitzers in emplacements surrounded by earth banks were used to provide vital artillery support to Operation al-Fajr ("New Dawn"). More than 300 fire missions were conducted during the battle. Marine M198 howitzers were supported by a battery of self-propelled M109A6 Paladins from A Battery, 3-82 Field Artillery of 1 CAV. (USMC)



Early on in Operation al-Fajr, a Marine scout sniper of HQ Company, 3/5 Marines, scans for insurgents from his remarkably comfortable hide! His M107 .50-cal LRSR (Long Range Sniper Rifle) has a range of 2000m. Typical Fallujah houses had a rooftop stairway that provided perfect sniper posts. It was common for Marine snipers to lay in wait here as tanks flushed insurgents out of hiding places. (LCpl. James Vooris, USMC)

A Dragon Eye UAV is readied for a reconnaissance mission in the early hours of Operation al-Fajr. The operators of this invaluable intelligence-gathering piece of equipment are from 3/5 Marines. A Dragon Eye system (consisting of two air vehicles) costs $60,000-$70,000, and 342 systems were delivered to the USMC between 2004 and 2006. (LCpl. James Vooris, USMC)

Marines line a narrow street as an M1A1 of A Company, 2nd Tank Battalion, rolls forward in a Fallujah neighborhood on 9 November. These combat troops are part of Bravo Company, BLT 1/3, of the 31st MEU. Abrams tanks provided indispensable heavy fire support but they contributed in a number of other ways too: drivers "pivot steered" their tanks in order to knock down walls; commanders positioned in their turrets could look over walls and warn infantrymen of threats; and tanks fired their 7.62mm and .50-cal MGs into the doorways and windows of houses. (USMC)

rocket fire for hours on end as they led attacks to identify enemy positions. It was only the thick armor of the powerful M1 Abrams tanks that prevented casualties amongst crews, with the three machine guns of each tank laying down heavy suppressive fire.

10 November: After two full days of fighting, Coalition forces were in possession of 70% of the city. This included the Government Center and several major mosques. Ground operations were being supported by targeted air strikes using laser-guided bombs against buildings housing insurgent fighters. Artillery and mortar fire would be called against intersections and buildings to drive defenders from rooftops. 1/3 Marines, commanded by LtCol. Michael Ramos, pushed south in the eastern part of the city, and by dusk had seized the Mujahereen Mosque. Marines also captured the Muhammadia Mosque in one of the largest encounters of the whole assault. This was an important conquest, for the mosque was being used as an insurgent bunker and command center. A convention center located right across the street was also captured, both facilities housing innumerable weapons, ammunition and IED-making materials. This was at the cost of eight Marines killed.

Marines of India Company, 3/5 Battalion, move forward through the rubble of a war zone on a patrol on 9 November. In the early stages of Operation al-Fajr, approximately one house in 50 contained insurgents, whereas near the end of fighting when the enemy had been cornered, around one in 20 harbored fighters. (Sgt. Luis Agostini, USMC)

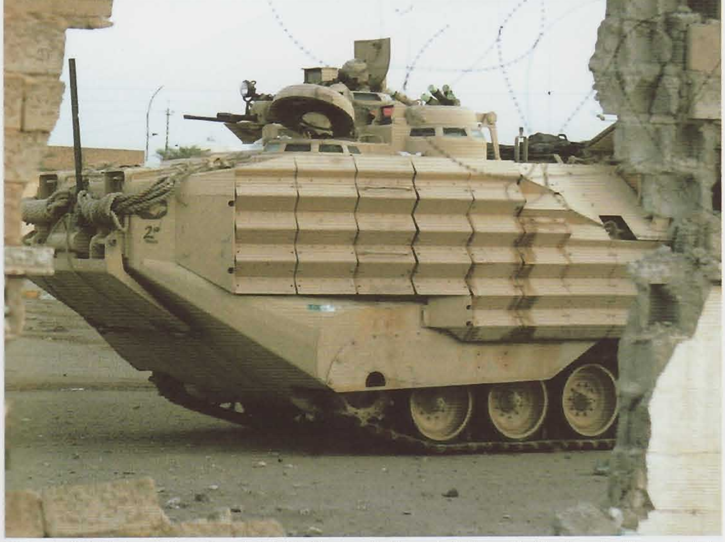
11 November: By now the northern half of Fallujah had fallen well ahead of schedule. 'Slaughterhouses' were discovered - houses containing the black clothing used by terrorists in their grisly hostage videos. In one 'prison house', an Iraqi taxi driver was found with shackled wrists and ankles after being abducted ten days earlier. With its heavy armored vehicles, 2-2 IN crossed the main east-west highway that bisects Fallujah and moved south into the city's industrial area and Queens. Hundreds of insurgents were now hiding amongst the buildings there, so 1/8 Marines, under LtCol. Gary Brandl, was sent in. Fighting was intense and exhausting. By way of example, Alpha Company crossed Highway 10 to take on the seat of resistance at 0300 hours. They moved through the "pizza slice", crossed Fran Ave and occupied a large four-story building behind enemy lines. Alpha Company's 1st Platoon began the day with 46 Marines and finished it with just 21. On the same day, in unrelated incidents, two Super Cobra helicopters were hit by ground fire and forced to make emergency landings.

U.S. forces turned over control of Jolan district, once a stronghold of insurgent activity, to Iraqi units. Though the tempo of fighting was gradually slowing down, Coalition units continued to move from house to house as they searched for insurgents and their weapons. Leaders predicted that control of Fallujah would be gained in the following 48 hours, with at least another week needed to fully secure every part of the city. By this stage 18 American and five Iraqi servicemen were dead, and 164 had been wounded. An estimated 600 insurgents lay dead.

12 November: Around 80% of the city was now in Coalition hands, while enemy forces had been driven into the southern part of the city, growing more desperate as the noose closed around them. Units fighting in the southwestern districts of Nazal and Resala faced stiff resistance from cornered defenders. 3/1 Marines was sent south across the main Highway to the west of 1/8 Marines, separated by Phase Line Henry. They attacked with two platoons forward, and one back to guard the rear and destroy weapon caches, but insurgents quickly adapted - they avoided the line of fire to the front, and ran around the flanks to shoot from the rear.

13 November: Officials asserted they had control over nearly the whole city and that organized resistance had ceased. House-to-house searches continued. According to the Iraqi National Security Adviser, more than 1000 insurgents were now dead, and another 200 had been captured.

14 November: Battalions continued their house searches, and Marines occupied practically the whole of the city by the afternoon. 3/5 Marines smashed through the labyrinthine Jolan *souk* (market), which had been savaged by earlier air strikes. One of the commodities sold in the *souk* was weapons . . . lots of them. In six days in the district, one battalion XO inventoried more than 100,000 weapons and large-caliber shells for destruction.



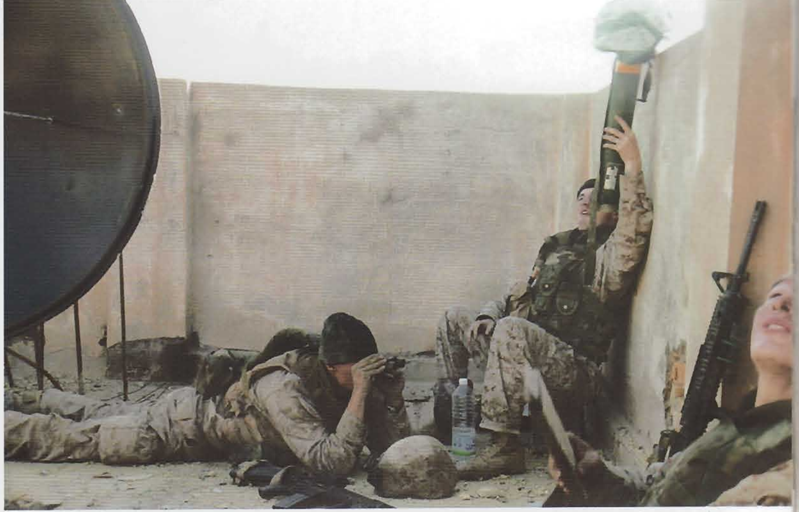
This AAV7A1 of the 2nd AAB (Assault Amphibian Battalion) sits outside the Government Center in the heart of Fallujah, this key feature being reached by nightfall on 9 November. This photo offers a good view of the EAAK (Enhanced Appliqué Armor Kit) fitted to the large AAV. The vehicle is capable of 72km/h on land or 13km/h in water. (LCpl. Trevor Gift, USMC)

15 November: This day was characterized by isolated pockets of fighting, mostly in the south of Fallujah. Here, insurgents had just a few blocks of houses left to hide in, with 3/1 and 1/8 Marines linking up to finish the job of mopping up the remnants. Coalition leaders issued a reassessed announcement that they needed at least four more days to gain total control. Tunnels were discovered that connected an underground bunker with a ring of buildings filled with weapons and anti-aircraft guns. The cautious clearing of houses was ongoing, complicated by the fact that numerous booby traps had been set by insurgents. Caches containing weapons, ammunition and bomb-making equipment were being continuously discovered, often in mosques and schools. Because insurgents were being forced into the southern suburbs, damage there was much more severe than in the north, with whole blocks razed by the Coalition assault.

16 November: 2-2 IN trapped 25 or so insurgents in a large, walled compound, with the bastion finally being destroyed in an air strike. A subsequent examination revealed an Arabic sign on a wall that read, "Al Qaeda Organization." Scattered in the debris of the terrorist lair were passports, computers, and letters from al-Zarqawi. Also found was an SUV rigged with explosives, and underground tunnels. This evil terrorist's base of operations was at last extinguished, this event signaling the end of major combat operations, but not of American casualties. Sporadic fighting was to continue until 23 December.

18 November: The Commander of I MEF, LtGen. John Sattler, declared they had "broken the back of the insurgency." The U.S. military described this battle as "some of the heaviest urban combat Marines and Army infantry soldiers have been involved in since Vietnam." The price was not cheap, with a death toll of 91 U.S. servicemen (three were non-combat related) and eight Iraqi soldiers, plus an estimated 1200 insurgents. This was in addition to 622 U.S. and 43 Iraqi troops wounded. Up to 1000 insurgents had been taken prisoner during the battle. A total of 29 IED/VBIED factories had been discovered up till this point.

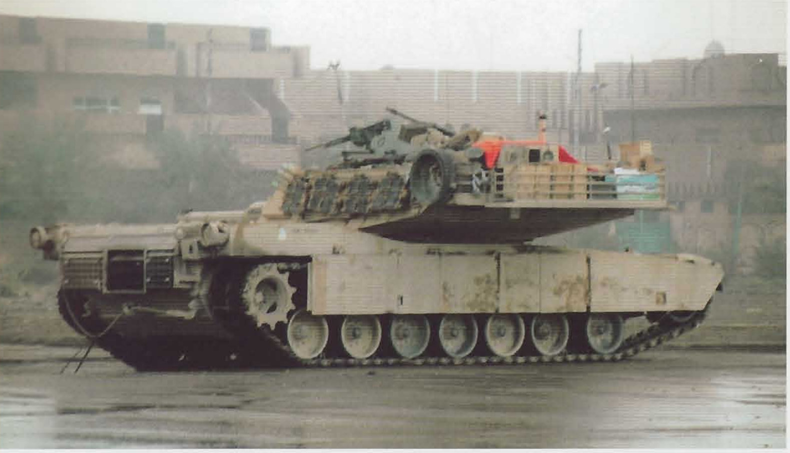
In this, the Second Battle of Fallujah, America conducted 540 air strikes, fired 14,000 artillery and mortar shells, and 2500 tank rounds. In the war-ravaged city, 18,000 of the city's 39,000 buildings lay damaged or destroyed. By early January, American troops had uncovered 503 weapon caches, and were still discovering an average of three per day, illustrating just how much of a threat Fallujah was. As another example, members of 3rd Platoon, India Company, 3/1 Marines, unearthed a remarkable weapon cache with a metal detector on 19 January. The following weapons were found: 73 57mm rockets, two 122mm rockets, 14 RPGs, 11 Russian antitank rockets, almost 100 120mm and 82mm mortar rounds, 20 assorted fragmentation grenades, 1700 AK-47 rounds, 14 blocks of TNT, 15 homemade rocket launchers, eight mortar systems, and even two SAMs!



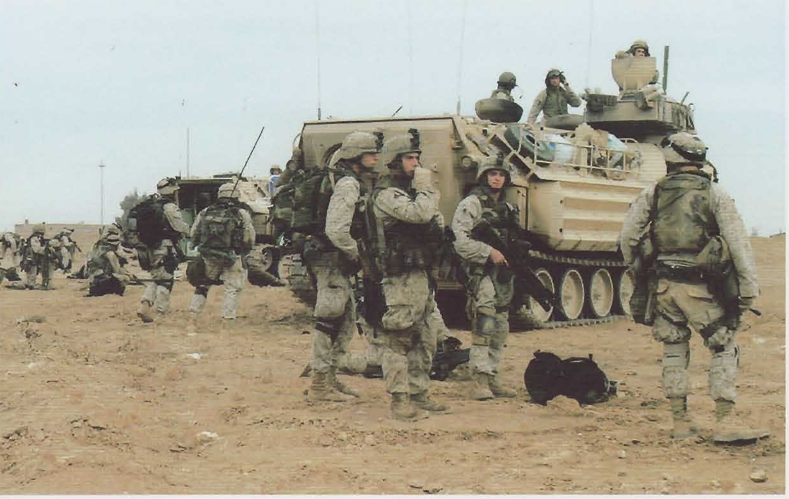
A member of 1/8 Marines of RCT-7 uses a SMAW rocket container to raise his helmet above the parapet to draw insurgent fire on 10 November. While he does so, another Marine spots with binoculars through a "mouse hole". Insurgents tended to fight in small, isolated groups of between 3 and 25 members. Insurgents would nearly always drag away the body of a comrade that was hit. They also knew the rules - if they made it to a mosque, they were usually safe! (LCpl. Joel Chaverri, USMC)

Members of 1/8 Marines advance through the rain-soaked streets of Fallujah on 9 November. The Marine in the foreground is aiming an M16A4 fitted with an ACOG sight and a Surefire tactical light. When assaulting a house, the normal practice was to throw grenades over the courtyard wall, blow the gate padlock, and rush a four-man fire team into the courtyard. The team would then bang on the windows and door. If there was no enemy response, the next dangerous task was smashing a way in and conducting a room-by-room search through dimly lit corridors. (LCpl. Joel Chaverri, USMC)

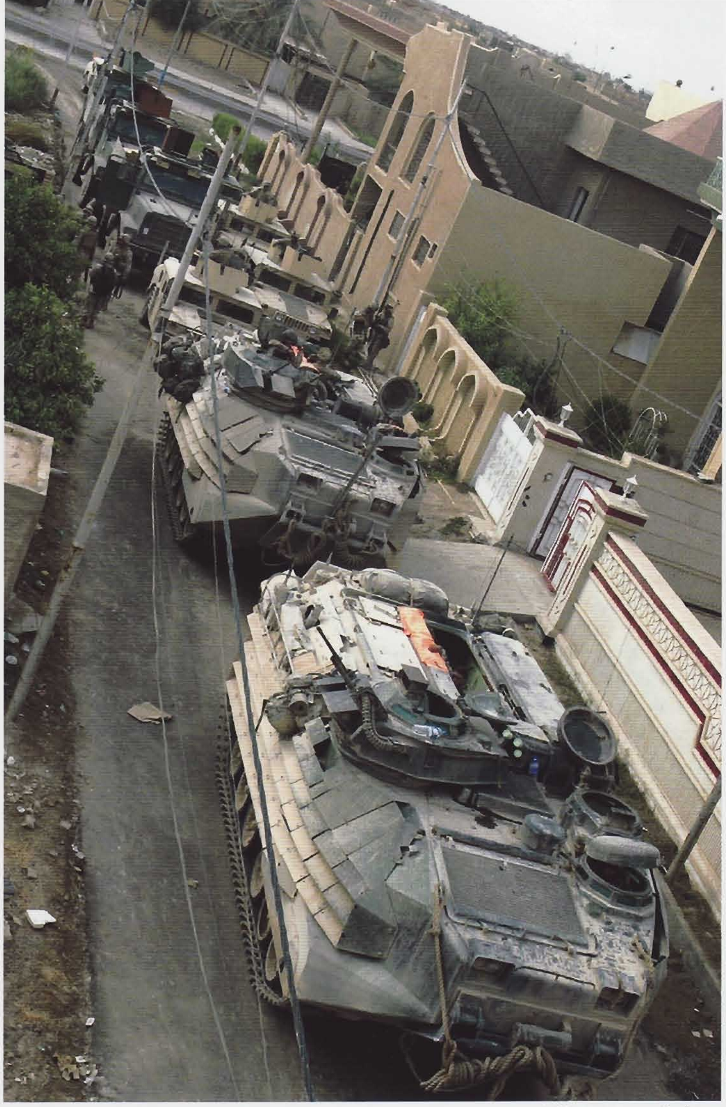
By this stage, attention was focusing on efforts to rebuild and clean up the city. In mid-December, more than a month after fighting started, residents were allowed to move back to their homes through a series of five special checkpoints. American and Iraqi troops were active in distributing humanitarian supplies from three aid distribution centers. Navy Seabees began hauling away tons of rubble from the city, and patching up countless homes. Efforts to restore electricity and water services were beginning, with responsibility for reconstruction work soon passing to local contractors. Officials reported that almost half of Fallujah's pre-battle population had returned to the devastated city by mid-January 2005, though others claim it was nearer 10%. Each returnee was vetted by ISF to ensure they were not returning with weapons, and each household head received $200 to help reestablish their homes. All residents received a biometric identification card with fingerprint and retina details, and were placed on a database to keep track of who was entering and leaving the city. In the aftermath of Operation al-Fajr, Fallujah was transformed into a peaceful city with few attacks. But then again, it was a heavily guarded city behind barbed wire. Over the previous 24 months of struggle in Fallujah, 151 Americans had died, and more than 1000 had been wounded.



Its turret clad in spare track blocks, an M1A1 swings its turret round to meet a threat in Fallujah. It carries a VS-17 aerial recognition panel, orange side out, over the EAPU. Marine tanks had a TI (Tank Infantry) phone fitted on the right rear, allowing infantry squad leaders to communicate directly with the tank crew and thus direct their fire. (LCpl. Joel Chaverri, USMC)

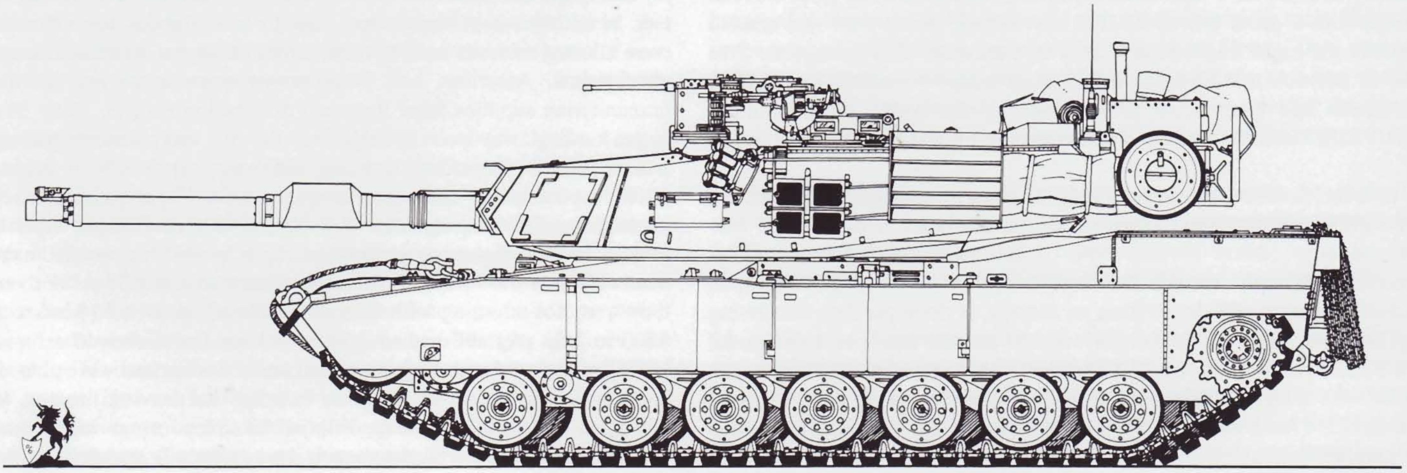


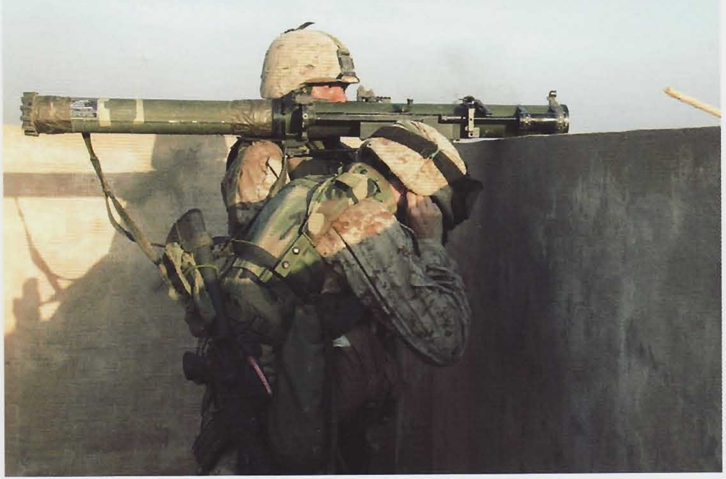
Marine personnel of RCT-7 prepare for further operations on 10 November. It so happened that 10 November was the 229th birthday of the USMC. Units stopped to observe the occasion, sometimes playing the Marine Corps hymn on the speakers of their Psyops Humvees! (SSgt. Jonathon Knauth, USMC)



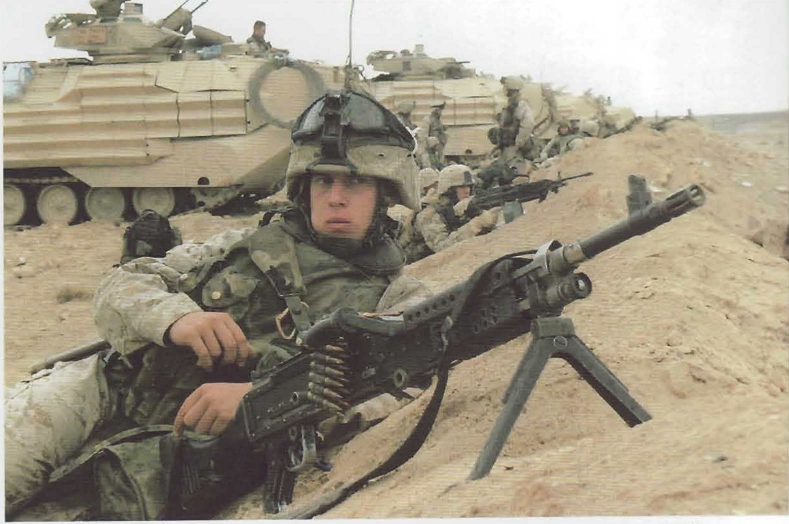
A convoy composed of AAV7A1s, 7-ton trucks and Humvees, brings supplies to Bravo Company of BLT 1/3 in Fallujah. The "Tuna Boats" (AAVs) and MTVR trucks played a crucial role in delivering essentials such as food, water, ammunition and soldiers' packs to combat units. AAVs also provided fire support, troop transportation and medevac capabilities. (USMC)

M1A1

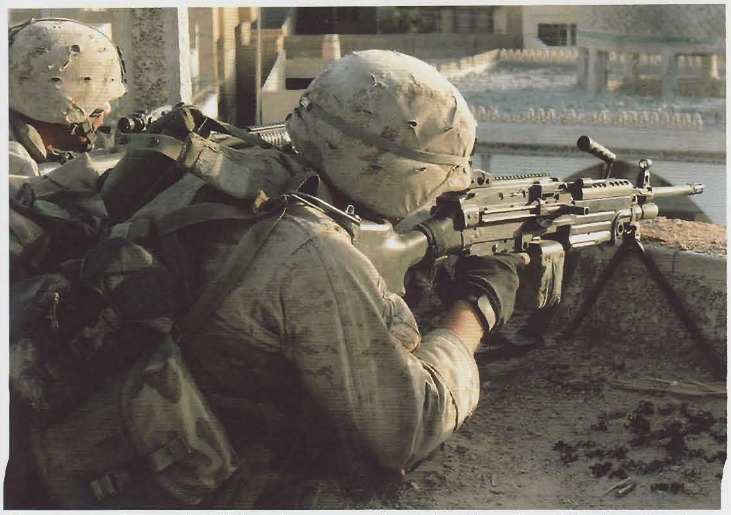




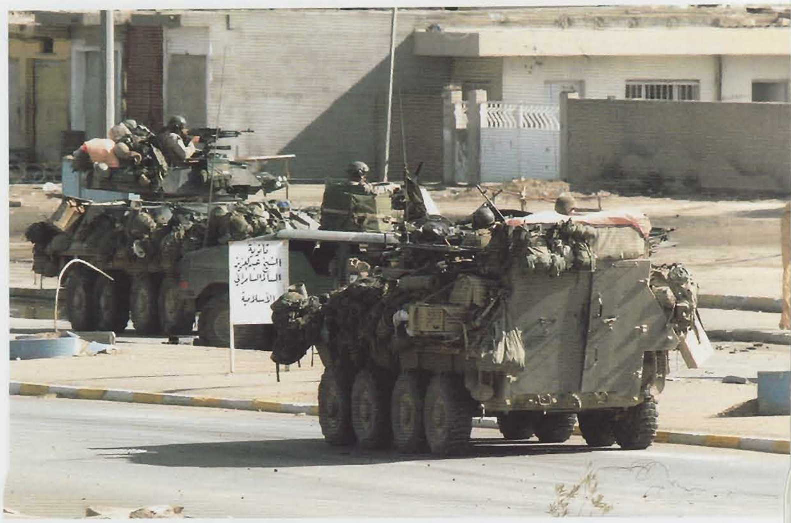
In the thick of battle, a Marine from 1/8 Battalion takes aim at a stubborn insurgent stronghold with his MK-153 SMAW (Shoulder-launched Multipurpose Assault Weapon). SMAW teams fired rockets (including thermobaric rounds) through windows of buildings housing stubborn defenders. Fighting in Operation al-Fajr was composed of repeated, unpredictable five-second encounters where combatants threw grenades, took snapshots from rooftops, and quickly ducked behind walls again. (LCpl. Joel Chaverri, USMC)



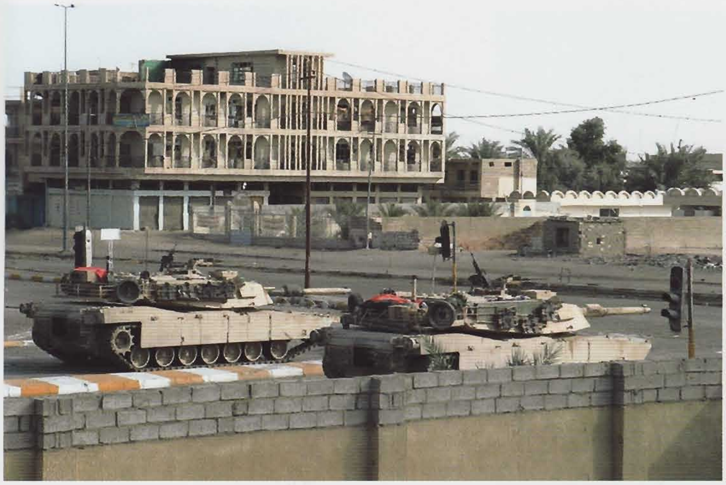
Marines of RCT-7 take up positions along the earth berm surrounding Fallujah on 10 November. The Marine in the foreground has a 7.62mm M240G, while in the background is a lineup of AAV7A1s. (SSgt. Jonathon Knauth, USMC)



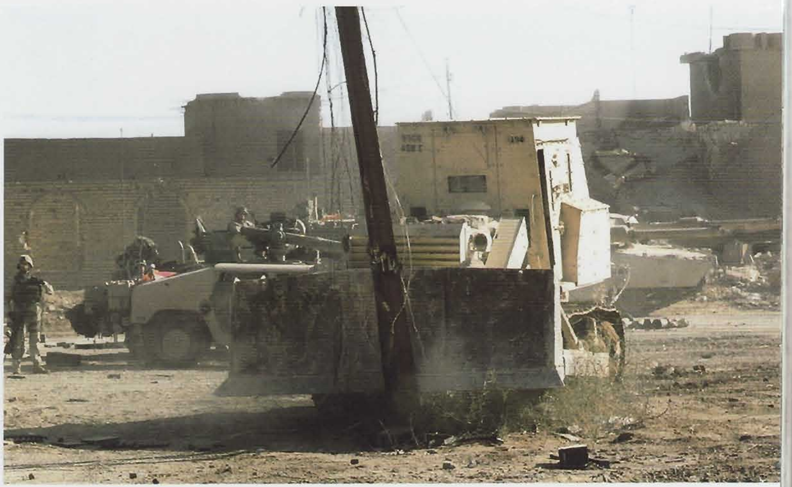
These members of 1/8 Marines are checking the street below for signs of insurgent activity on 11 November. This M249 SAW has already seen a considerable amount of firing, judging by the spent belt links lying next to it. In street fighting, Marines commonly punched mouse holes in walls, built barricades in front of their MG positions, and shifted rooms every ten minutes or so. Marines typically carried 70 pounds of armor and ammunition during the battle. (SSgt. Jonathon Knauth, USMC)



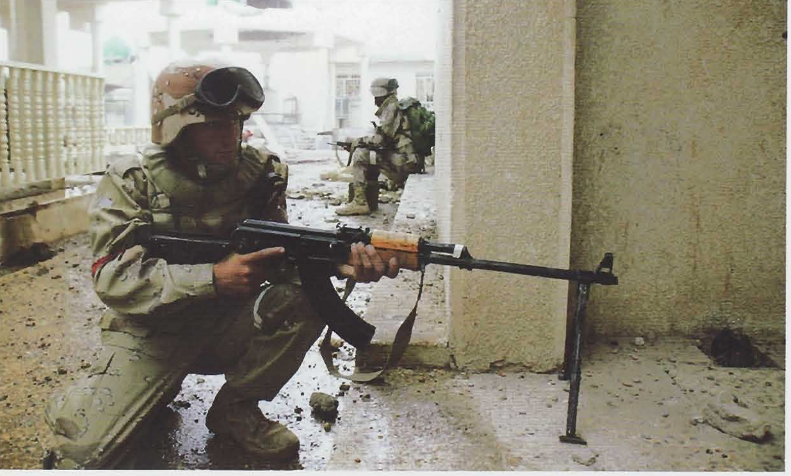
A Humvee and a pair of LAVs are seen on 11 November in the center of Fallujah. The nearest vehicle is a LAV-L (Logistics) variant, while the vehicle in the background is an LAV-25. The commander of the LAV-25 seems to have a target in the sights of his M240G. In this type of MOUT (Military Operations in Urban Terrain), it was rare to see an enemy fighter for more than about two seconds. (SSgt. Jonathon Knauth, USMC)



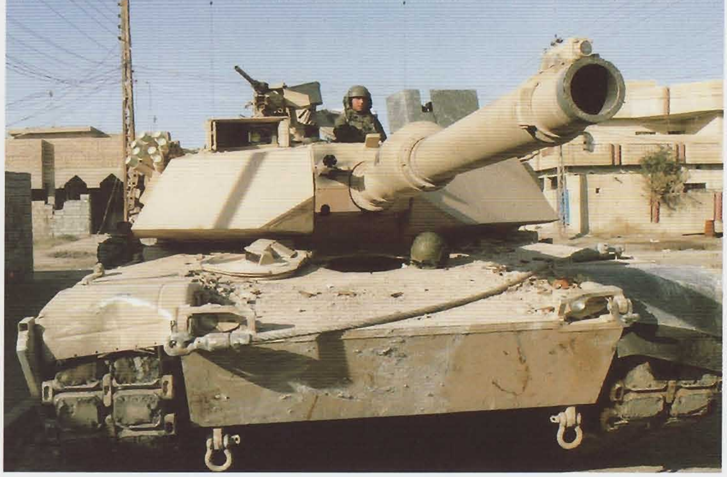
Two M1A1 Abrams tanks support a patrol of 1/8 Marines on 11 November. The near tank has a tow bar frame stowed on the rear of the turret bustle rack, while the far M1A1 has a replacement bore evacuator section fitted on its gun tube. The cover for the TI phone on the rear of the right-hand tank is open. (SSgt. Jonathan Knauth, USMC)



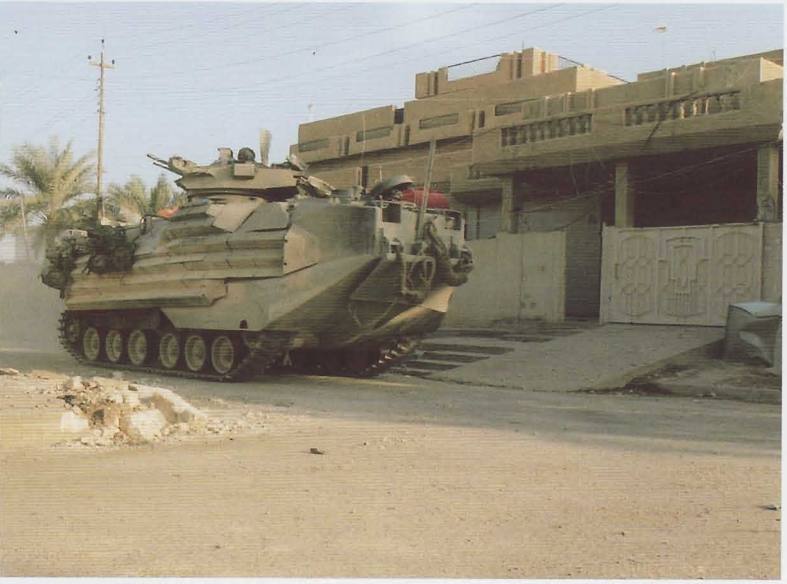
A D7G armored bulldozer belonging to the Army's 458th Engineer Battalion knocks down a power pole in "Queens", a 4km^2 district of jumbled dwellings south of Highway 10. This vehicle is fitted with a 3084kg Caterpillar MCAP (Mine Clearing/Armor Protection) kit, increasing the dozer's weight to 23,178kg. (LCpl. Ryan Jones, USMC)



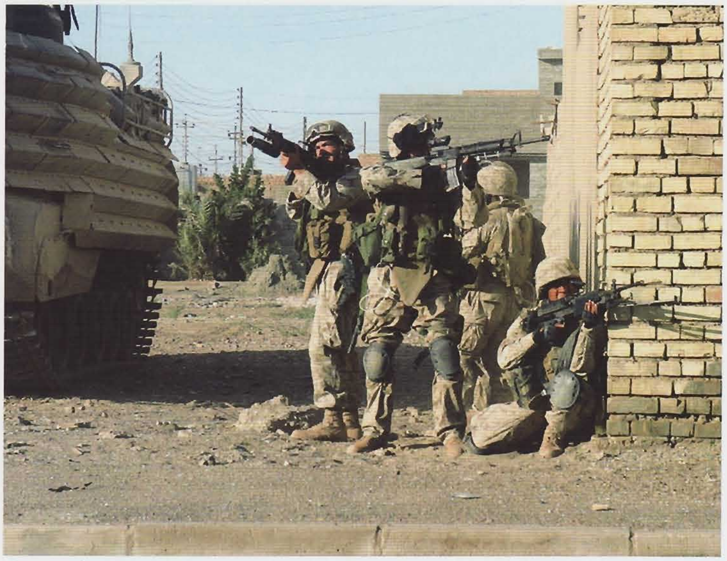
Operations in Fallujah were conducted in close association with Iraqi security personnel, and here an ING "jundi" (as Iraqi soldiers are colloquially referred to) with a 7.62mm RPK light machine gun posts security on 12 November. ING soldiers secured rear areas after Marines or soldiers had passed through. Insurgents had stashes of ING uniforms available to aid the infiltration of American lines. (Cpl. Joel Chaverri, USMC)



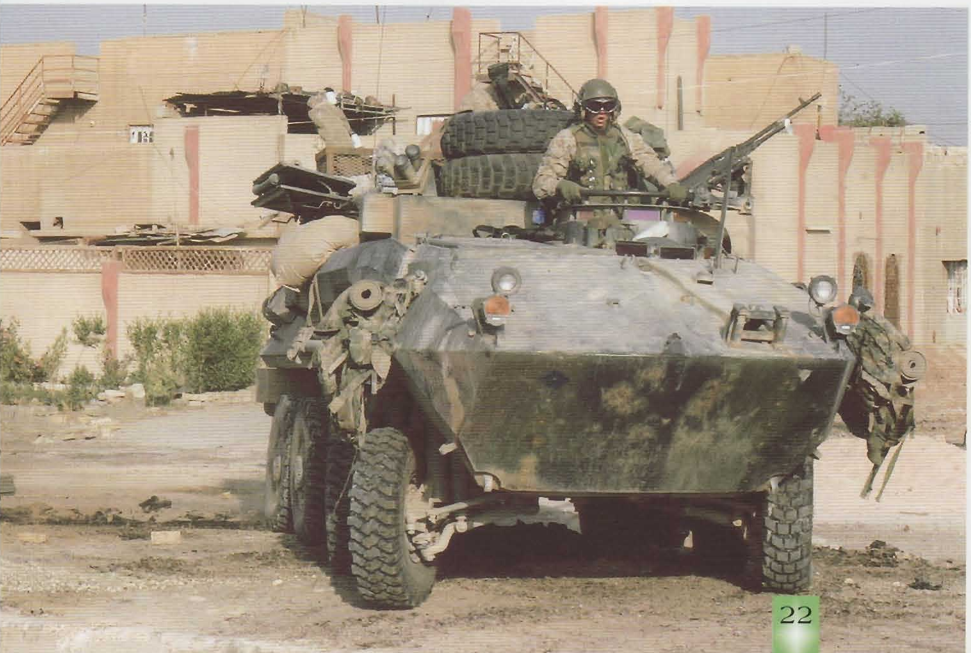
This M1A1, with its buckled front fenders and rubble-strewn hull, has seen heavy combat in the urban morass of Fallujah. Note the makeshift armored shield installed in front of the loader's M240 MG. The tow cable has been attached to the front shackles so that instant recovery missions can be carried out. Note the extremely worn condition of the rubber pads on the T-158 track links. (LCpl. Benjamin Flores, USMC)



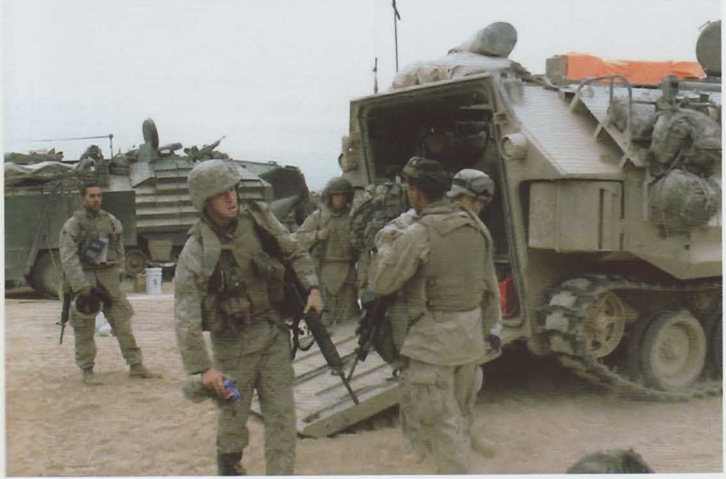
An AAV7A1 trundles along a suburban street on 15 November. The commander's head is visible in the UGWS (Up-Gunned Weapon Station) hatch. Note the wire cutter post fitted to the bow of the vehicle, a feature commonly seen on AAVs. An EAAK adds around 2000kg to an AAV, but importantly for operations in Iraq, it provides protection against 155mm shell fragments. (LCpl. Daniel Klein, USMC)



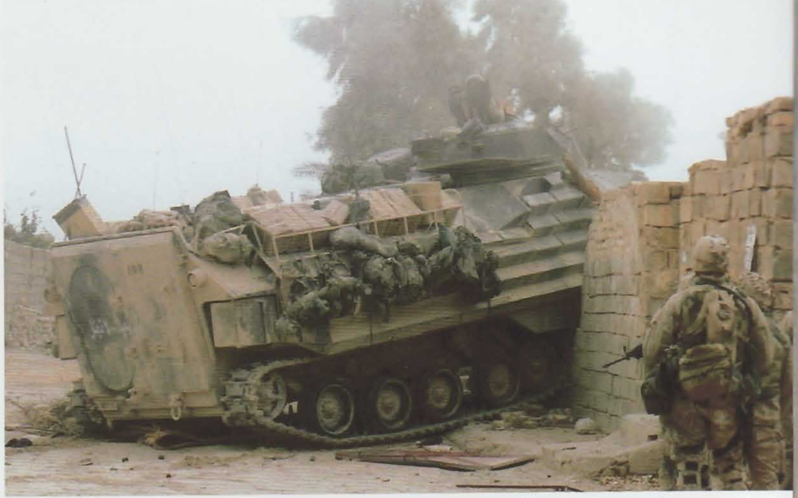
Troops from 1st Platoon, Charlie Company, of 1/3 Marines. Backed by an AAV, this fire team pauses at an intersection on 13 November. A typical attack would be led by tanks and dismounted infantry platoons, followed by Humvees carrying water and spare ammo. The Humvees leapfrogged each other along the streets looking for lines of fire along alleyways, using their Mk. 19s and MGs against fighters fleeing the initial assault wave. (LCpl. Daniel Klein, USMC)



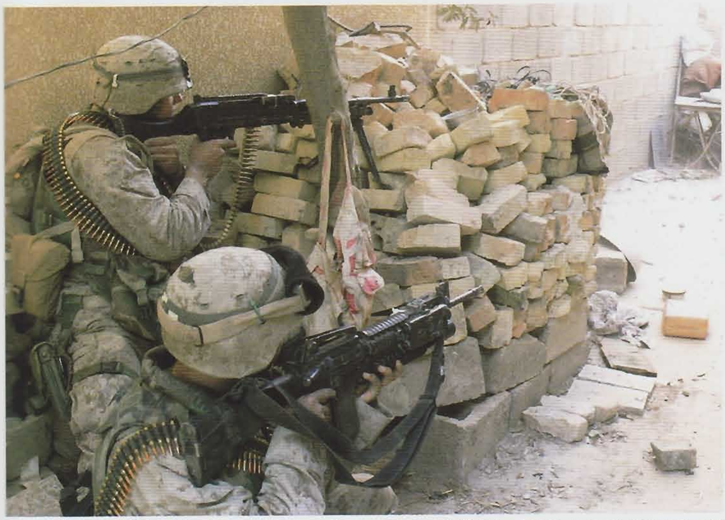
This overloaded LAV-L is being used for security near a mosque as members of 1/3 Marines and the ING pass out supplies to civilians in the besieged city. The LAV-L is used to carry ammunition, supplies and POL (Petrol, Oil, Lubricants) in support of forward LAV detachments. (LCpl. Daniel Klein, USMC)



This picture was taken at Camp Owen during a 48-hour "op pause" (operational pause) on 17 November. Exhausted "Grunts" of 1st Platoon, Charlie Company, 1/3 Marines, unload from their "Amtrac," planning to use the respite to visit wounded buddies, repair damaged gear, and prepare for their next mission. An AAV platoon fields 14 AAV7PA1s, with four such AAV platoons allocated to each company. The upgraded AAV7A1 RAM/RS (Reliability, Availability and Maintainability/Rebuild to Standard) utilizes the engine, power train and torsion bar suspension system of the Bradley. (LCpl. Daniel Klein, USMC)

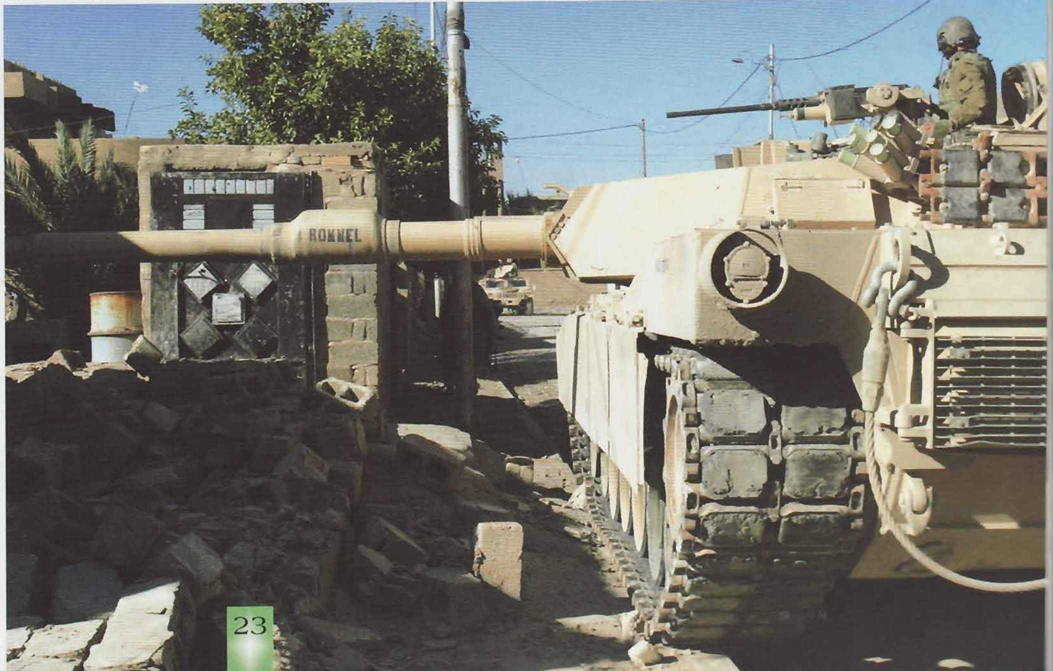


A dusty AAV helps breach a courtyard wall after a locked gate stymied the accompanying infantry. Wearing helmets bedecked in scrimmage camouflage, these members of 2nd Platoon, India Company, 3/1 Marines, prepare to clear the compound. Each courtyard house took about 20 minutes to clear, with one fire team remaining outside to give cover while two teams went inside. If resistance was met, the line halted while tanks came up to send shell after shell into offending structures. When enemy fire stopped, the Marines would carry on. (LCpl. Ryan Jones, USMC)

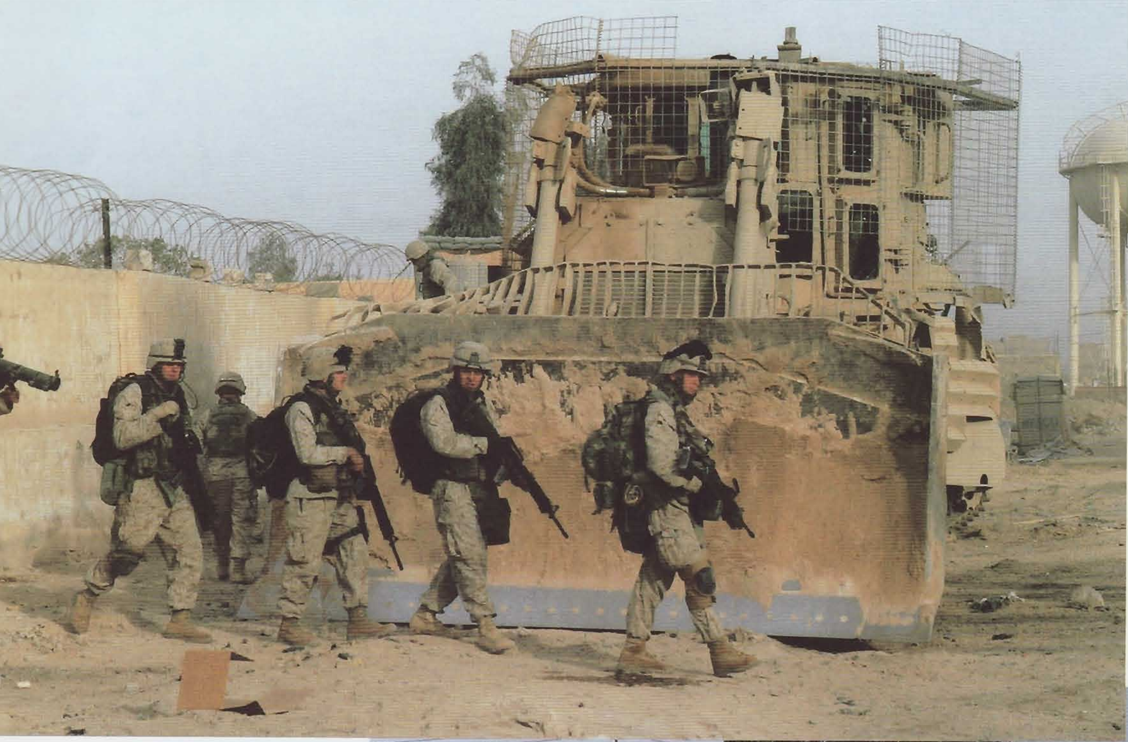


Members of 3rd Platoon, Bravo Company, 1/8 Marines, have set up an MG position on 25 November. Belts of 7.62mm ammunition are slung over their shoulders, with orange-tipped tracers identifiable. The Marine on the right has an M16A2 assault rifle fitted with an AN/PEQ-2A aiming light. Also popular amongst troops is the M9 pistol for operations in confined spaces like stairwells. (USMC)

Comrades recover the body of a lance corporal from 3rd Platoon, Bravo Company, 1/8 Marines, after a bitter firefight with insurgents. Meanwhile, a couple of squad members "pie" a room, sweeping it with their weapon barrels. A study of the 2003 liberation of Iraq showed that only 9% of combat wounds to Army casualties were in the trunk, demonstrating the value of IBA. (SSgt. Jonathan Knauth, USMC)

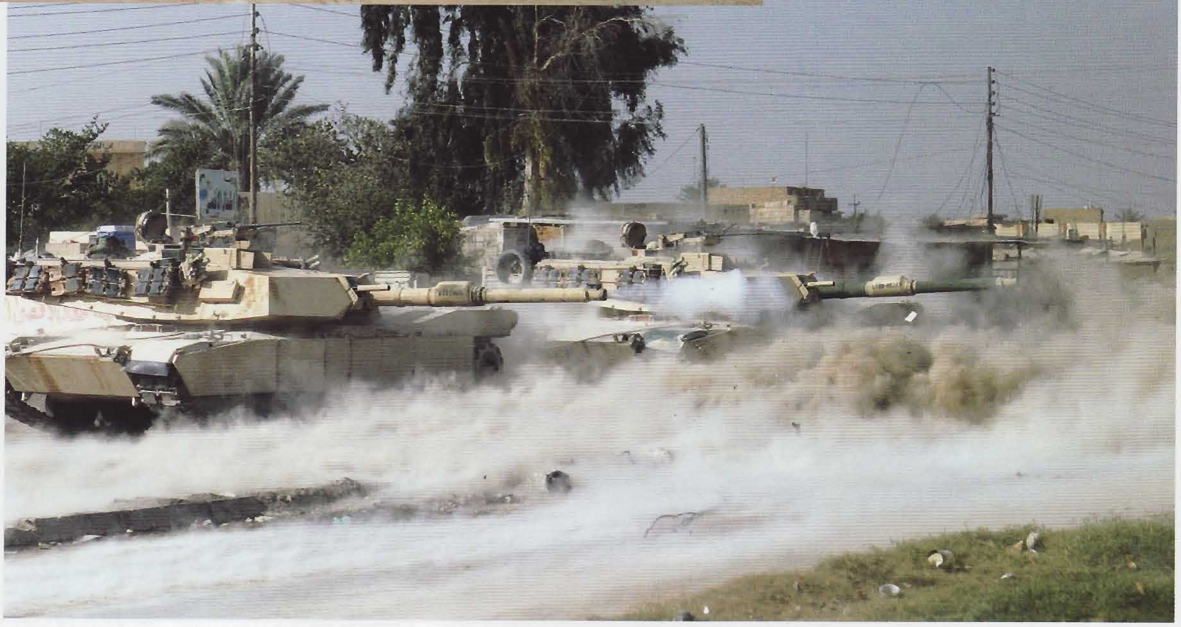


"Rommel", an M1A1 tank, points its barrel at point-blank range towards an insurgent house on 25 November. Tanks no longer used CIPs (Combat Identification Panels) in OIF 2 since there was no danger of tank friendly-fire incidents. (SSgt. Jonathan Knauth, USMC)



This photo gives an indication of the sheer size of the D9R armored bulldozers that were a vital asset in the conquest of Fallujah. The Caterpillar D9R is massive, with a weight of 55,800kg when the armor kit is added. The IMI (Israeli Military Industries) armor kit protects the bulldozer's external hydraulics, mechanical systems and operator's cab. The cab armor, including ballistic glazing, can withstand 155mm artillery shell splinters and direct hits from 12.7mm ammunition. (SSgt. Jonathan Knauth, USMC)

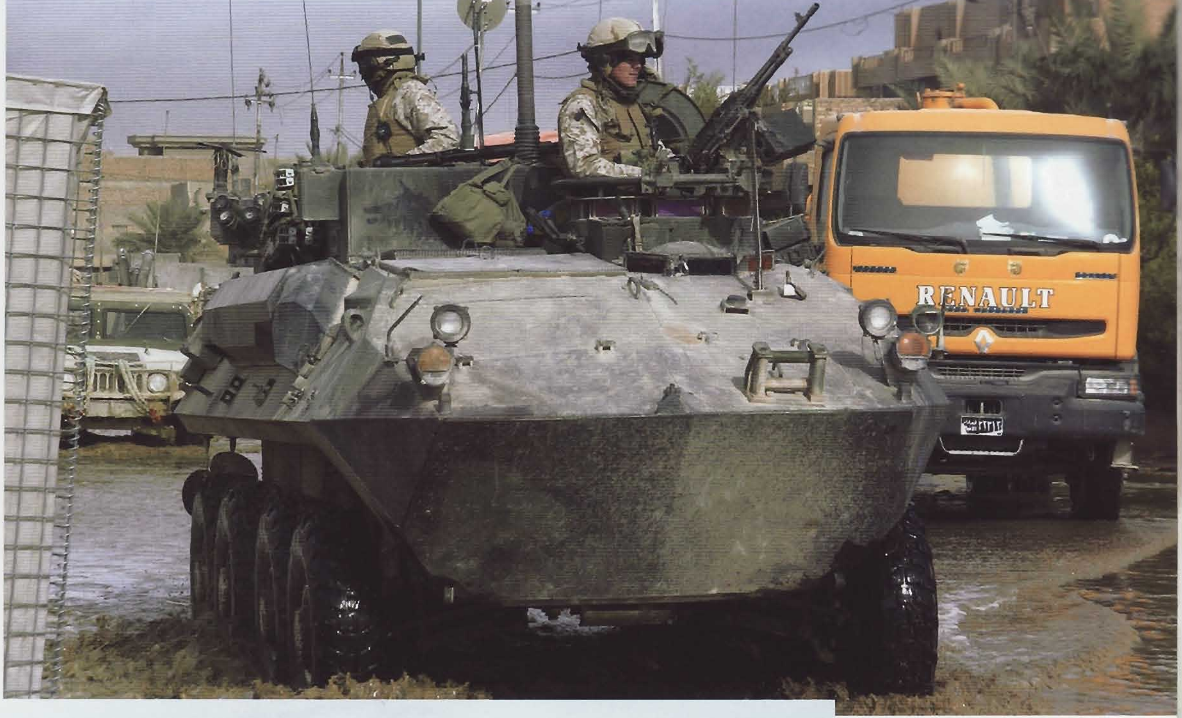
"Maximus" and "Lion-Heart" fire their M256 120mm smoothbore guns in support of 1/8 Marines on 26 November. Dismounted Marines are supposed to be 60m to the side or rear when an M1 fires, but this is usually not possible in urban combat. Instead, infantrymen in Fallujah had to crouch, place hands over their ears, and brace themselves. When the guns fired, shockwaves battered and vibrated their bodies, sucking the air from their lungs. (SSgt. Jonathan Knauth, USMC)

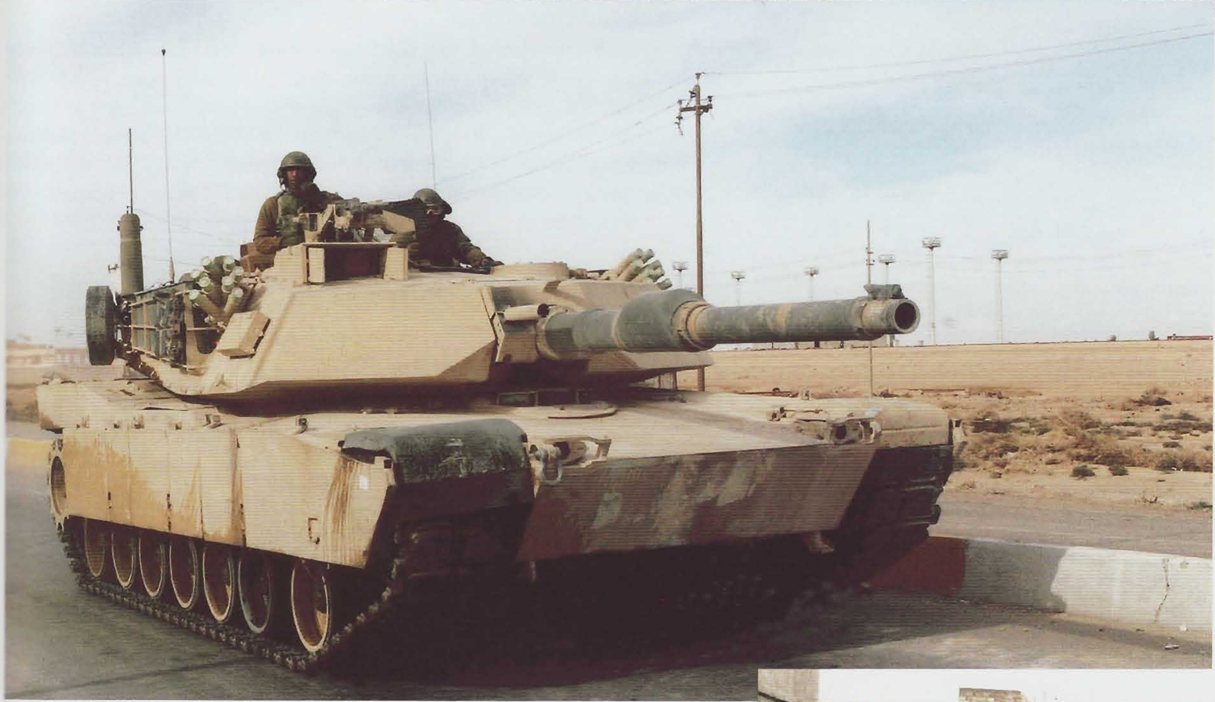


An M1A1 prepares to respond to a mortar attack. Shipping labels have been attached on the side of the hull at the front and rear. Operation al-Fajr was a sizeable test in modern urban combat for the USMC. 1st and 2nd Force Recon Companies supplied teams intensively trained in CQB for particular trouble spots. (LCpl. Jordan Sherwood, USMC)

In a joint mission, Iraqi soldiers and U.S. Marines clear a badly damaged building. "Enter every room with a boom" was an apt epithet of the Marines. One entry technique is "running the rabbit," where the point man rushes across a room to distract the enemy while the second man in the stack does the shooting. In April 2004, it was recorded that an alarming 80% of the ING and police had deserted in Fallujah, but there were marked improvements in the November fighting. (LCpl. James Vooris, USMC)

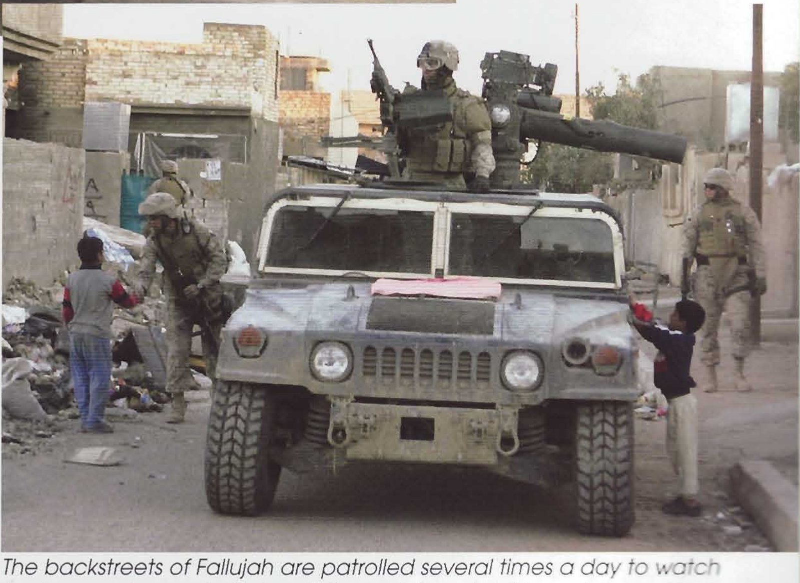
A dust-encrusted 8x8 LAV-C (Command) variant wades through an inundated section of Fallujah in early December. The LAV-C is identified by the array of aerials and the VHF antenna located behind the commander's position. The city's infrastructure and utilities were devastated, while ruptured water pipes led to widespread flooding and a loss of water supplies. (JO1 Jeremy Wood, USN)





This muddied M1A1 from the 2nd Tank Battalion, without any distinguishing markings, moves to a new position in the city of Fallujah in support of 3/5 Marines. A full set of 16 IR (Infrared) screening smoke grenades are ready for use in the two turret-mounted launchers, which are of a different design to Army Abrams. (LCpl. James Vooris, USMC)

A Humvee backs up a patrol in Fallujah on 21 March 2005. These are members of 3rd Platoon, C Company, 1/6 Marines. Squad members are fairly dispersed so as to make a more difficult target. They wear desert combat boots, which have received criticism for having soles that are too soft and easily damaged by Iraq's rough terrain. A couple of Marines are wearing "turtle shell" pads on their knees. (Cpl. Mike Escobar, USMC)



The backstreets of Fallujah are patrolled several times a day to watch for insurgents or criminal activity, and to establish a strong military presence. This M1046 Humvee boasts an M220 TOW missile launcher and belongs to 1st CAAT, Weapons Company, of 1/6 Marines. (Cpl. Mike Escobar, USMC)

Into the Breach

A personal account of Operation Phantom Fury by Andreas J. Elesky MSgt. USMC (Ret.). The author served as senior advisor to 2nd Company, 5th Battalion, 3rd Iraqi Army Division during combat in Fallujah.

On 21 October, the advisory team was notified that the 5th Battalion was to move by convoy to Camp Fallujah as part of the effort to retake the town from insurgents. We wanted to avoid soldiers deserting as happened to other Iraqi units. Talking with other advisors who had already led Iraqis in combat, we were informed we would lose about 50% of our soldiers. We were unable to keep the word from spreading down to individual soldiers, and just as predicted, we lost about half of the battalion.

Our convoy of 65 vehicles, escorted by seven Humvees and two Apache attack helicopters, departed Camp Cooke on 30 October along one of the major roads that would take us through what everyone was calling “ambush alley.” Our convoy had two anti-IED vehicles in it but this still didn’t prevent us from being ambushed. We were skirting the edge of Baghdad and were on the airport freeway when the rear of the convoy was hit by an IED and small-arms weapons fire. We halted and returned fire. Insurgents were firing from behind sand dunes and rooftops of houses along the right side of the freeway. We sustained a few wounded, but no deaths.

As we caught up with our Marine escort the entire convoy came under fire from the village of Abu Ghraib. We were hit by mortars, small and heavy weapons, and a car bomb. One of our vehicles had a mortar round land next to it, killing one of the most popular Iraqi soldiers in the battalion. We didn’t lose any additional vehicles but suffered 1 KIA and 12 wounded. While we were busy getting everyone moving again, the Apache helicopters were making runs on the suspected insurgent positions. The advisors in Humvees were suppressing the area with Mk.19, M240 and .50-cal fires. The Iraqi commanders and NCOs got everyone moving and back on their vehicles. Once everyone was moving, we headed straight for Camp Fallujah.

5 November (D-2): The morning was spent training with Marines of B Company, 1/3 Marines, my Iraqi troops learning how to ride and exit from Amtraks, plus patrolling techniques used by the Marines.

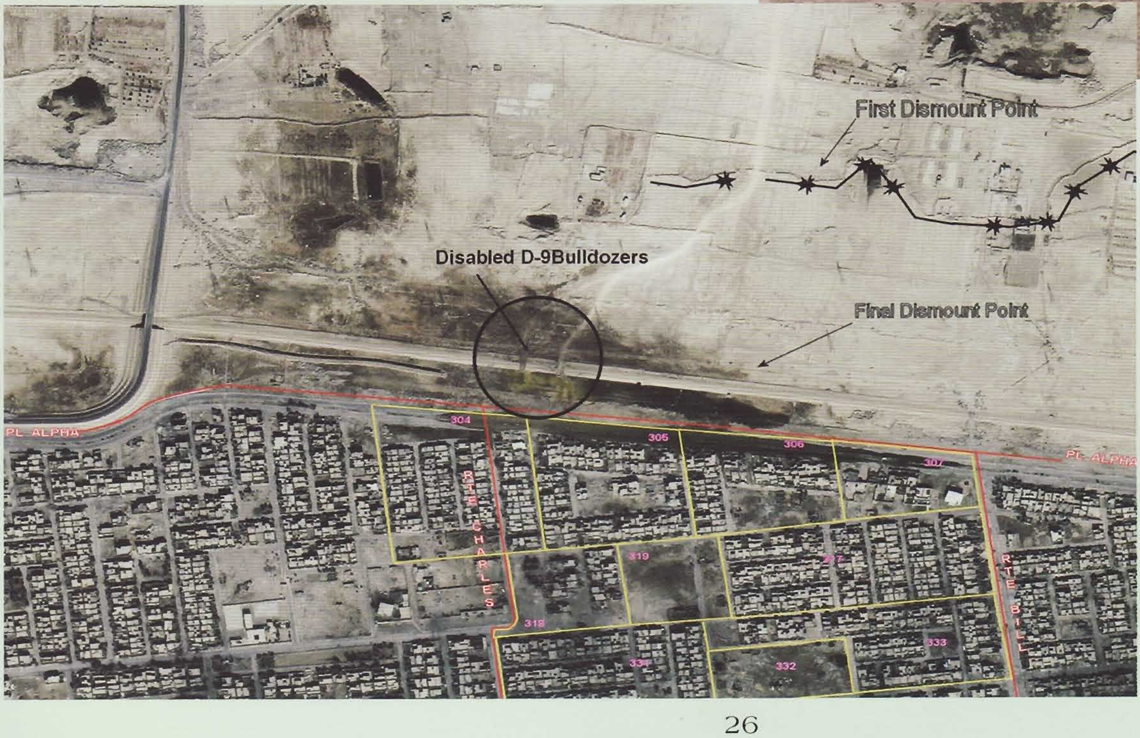
7 November (D-Day): We started with a dress rehearsal for D-Day. Pre-combat inspections were conducted and ammunition was drawn and handed out to all the Iraqis. Even though this was D-Day (other units were moving into place outside the city), we weren’t scheduled to move until the morning of 8 November.

8 November (D+1): We departed Camp Fallujah for our attack position at 0700. We were heading down Highway 10 when preparatory Marine and Army artillery fire started hitting targets in the northern part of the city. We arrived at our attack position at about 0900 and were tied in with A Co, 1/3 to our left, and 2nd Plt, B Co, 1/3 to our right.

The Amtraks departed with the first load of Marines from A Co, 1/3 at 1900. Just as the first Amtrak climbed over the highway berm all hell seemed to break loose. Artillery seemed to be firing from everywhere. We could see the breach site at the railway line and all the fire coming and going in the city. I tuned my radio to the Amtrak frequency so I could follow their progress. You could hear excited voices talking about what to avoid on the run towards the railroad line, which was serving as the debarkation point. The Amtrak radio conversations suddenly grew more intense and desperate. One of the tracks had hit a mine and was down with wounded aboard.

I was informed the Amtrak that had been lost was one of mine, so we were forced to squeeze everyone into one vehicle. I soon discovered how uncomfortable a “track” can truly be. In the end we loaded 43 soldiers into one Amtrak! We departed for the breach point at 2100. The vehicle seemed to be moving forever. When the ramp finally opened, we all moved to our positions prior to moving through the gap towards the railroad berm.

The Iraqi Army convoy of 5th Battalion, 3rd Division, prepares to move from Camp Cooke to Camp Fallujah. (MSgt. Andreas Elesky, USMC)



Satellite picture showing breach point in the north of Fallujah

The company runner came down the line to inform me that we needed to push over the top of the berm quickly since the area was under machine gun and RPG fire. We could see wounded Marines being carried out to the "tracks" to make the run back. A quick check of the Iraqis showed some scared faces - it now all boiled down to the training they'd received. We followed the berm to where the D9 dozers had been disabled by RPGs. It was apparent the lead D9 had taken an RPG to the cab, while the second D9 had been disabled trying to bypass it. There were explosions between the berm and the outer walls of the city. A four-lane road lay between us and the intended breach site. I took my company of Iraqi soldiers and moved to the left to establish our support-by-fire position. I placed one PKM on the far left and the other in the center of the position. We had plenty of fire passing high over our heads and lots coming from the first couple of blocks in the city. From my position I could see 1st Plt, B Co, 1/3 moving up to the walls looking for a breach site as we were to avoid entering the city using the roads.

9 November (D+2): At 0210 we entered the city through the living room and kitchen of a house. We came out of the house and moved off to our left and took up positions in two houses with great fields of fire overlooking a large open area of block 318. 1st and 3rd Plts, A Co, 1/3 were off to our right just inside block 304 but east of Phase Line Charles (PL Charles separated our axis of advance from A Co, 1/3). The Army's 2-2 IN was operating on our left flank east of PL Bill.

We were stuck in this area until about 0830 when a concentrated push was made to cross the open area in block 318. The first three pairs of Marines made it across under covering fire before insurgents started shooting. The next two Marines were about halfway across when one was hit in the leg by mortar fragments. He was quickly dragged back to our position from where the corpsmen evacuated him to the casualty collection point. We continued to move across the open area two at a time, and once across the teams started clearing the houses the insurgents were firing from. My interpreter, Sgt Hayden, and I made the dash across the open area and took up a covering position waiting for the rest of my company to cross. I assigned the PKM positions that covered the road ahead of us. Objective 2 PL Beth had been reached at 0930.

We could hear fighting coming from all directions as adjacent units pushed south in their respective zones. Just as we started to move, some LAV-25s (call sign "Warpig") made their first appearance in our sector. My company started moving south into block 331, though we were to only enter and search houses that looked suspicious or displayed resistance. Our main objective was to secure PL Fran (Highway 10). The other platoons were making rapid advances with occasional firefights. It was about this time that we saw movement and muzzle flashes coming from a school wall to our front. My Iraqi soldiers didn't need any incentive to return fire. As we were engaging these targets, neighboring Marines fired an AT-4, and all firing died away. We took this opportunity to rush across the open area and establish ourselves in block 342. Once at the wall we could see what had been shooting at us - insurgents had PKM fighting positions at the base of the wall under bushes. There were seven dead insurgents lying around both positions, and one must have been the RPG gunner since he had a vest with some rockets still strapped to it. There were a couple of blood trails heading south along the school wall.

We continued moving south. We moved into positions around the first few houses in block 347 and were told to establish a quick perimeter and rest. The Marines and Iraqi soldiers took this time to quickly drink and eat something and reload magazines. I had just sat down for a bite to eat when Sgt Hayden found a blood trail leading into the house. We set up a perimeter and cleared the house. We found a young man in his late teens with about half his right calf missing huddled in the kitchen corner of the house. He was wearing the same Adidas sneakers and tracksuit as the RPG team we had just engaged. The Marines had their corpsman bandage and clean his wound while he was being questioned by the interpreter and a Sgt from the intelligence section.

A 7-ton MTVR departs Camp Fallujah the day before Operation al-Fajr is launched. (MSgt. Andreas Elesky, USMC)

We started moving south again and made a right turn heading west. 1st and 3rd Plts from B Co came onto the same road, so we were now moving as an entire force down the same road in block 347. There were a few dead insurgents lying or propped up against the wall, looking like they had died running for cover. We reached the four-lane road separating blocks 347 and 402 (PL Cathy, Objective 3). Crossing over this road, I noticed there were homemade rockets attached to the sides of lampposts with garage door sensors tied to the base and wires running up to the triggers.

It was now 1300 and we were planning our next move. We were to basically move south into block 425 (PL Donna) with 1st and 3rd Plts moving parallel to us. My Iraqi company encountered some more firing from buildings to our front, but we continually moved forward from house to house, clearing as we went. At the southern end of the street we had a short but intense fight with four insurgents, two of whom we captured with minor wounds. We were now looking across a two-lane road with a median; this was Objective 4, with just one more to go before the end of the day.

As a battalion, we had reached all of our objectives for the day, the main objective being PL Fran (Highway 10) running through the middle of the city. This high-speed avenue of approach would allow us to move vehicles and equipment more quickly between Camp Fallujah and units in the city. In certain areas, units had crossed over this objective and held areas to the south. The road wasn't 100% secure at the moment and only armored vehicles could move along it. Two "tracks" bringing in supplies arrived, and we received water, food and ammunition.

10 November (D+3): The Marine Corps Birthday started off with a blast. We were all up getting ready to go search our assigned sectors and in the distance you could hear the Marine Corps Hymn playing. A CA group Humvee was driving through some of the cleared routes playing the Marine Corps Hymn. My plan was to move east along the road behind our current position working our way towards the mosque that had been playing recorded music and propaganda the previous day. We worked our way to a position across the street from the mosque, which was surrounded by an eight-foot high wall with a small courtyard at the main entrance. There were two cars and one pickup parked along the walls. Sgt Hayden led a team a across the street to take a quick look at the vehicles, discovering that the pickup had wired artillery shells in the bed. I called the engineer team leader and he decided to destroy the truck with C4 and a time delay fuse. We took cover in the surrounding houses and waited for the blast. When the charge detonated it destroyed the other two vehicles and created a hole in

Members of 2nd Company pose for a photo on 11 November. (MSgt. Andreas Elesky, USMC)

the courtyard wall. Lt Iraq led a team into the mosque, finding no insurgents but good-sized weapons caches.

Once we started moving house to house, we had two teams searching and two teams providing security. Most houses contained nothing and were cleared fairly quickly. We came across a house that had 30 industrial oxygen bottles lying against a wall, and decided to do a detailed search. Upon entering the courtyard it was obvious this house was an insurgent staging ground and munitions factory. What we found amazed us all – this building had served as a safe house as well as an IED factory. The living room contained stacks of foreign passports and photo albums of many of the insurgents. One album chronicled an entire busload of insurgents traveling from Jordan to Fallujah. There were Motorola radios, handheld GPS devices, maps, and old Iraqi Army uniforms. There was so much ordnance that a decision was made to gather it in the living room and courtyard so we could destroy it. Once everything was rigged with C4 and detcord, we lit the fuse and ran to the east corner of the block. We jumped when the charges detonated, and a large dust cloud hung over the area. A quick look showed a hole where the IED factory had once stood, with debris strewn across the road.

Looking over the wall of a house, we saw multiple mortar tubes and rounds lying about the courtyard. I instructed Sgt Hayden to establish a perimeter and we started to search. The CI (Counterintelligence) Marine and I noticed the mortar rounds scattered around the courtyard had been modified, with holes drilled into the tops of each warhead. I then decided to take a look at the pickup truck parked under the carport. Its bed contained a 120mm mortar and more modified rounds. We began checking the truck to make sure it wasn't booby trapped. A quick inspection showed nothing out of the ordinary, so I pulled out a heavy briefcase from the passenger seat. I did a quick inspection to see if it was booby trapped, and decided to open it. The briefcase contained lots of brown manila envelopes as well as firing tables, a couple of passports, and lots of other paperwork. I took out a manila envelope and saw it contained vials containing a liquid. By this time the CI Marine was standing next to me, and we both read aloud "Soman-Sarin V-Gas." We couldn't believe what we had just read and stood there dumbfounded. I immediately got on the radio to the Marine company commander and the CI Marine called in a FLASH report to his command. At first nobody wanted to believe what we had discovered and we had to describe the contents of the packages, writing and markings we had found. There were 20 identical packages containing 20 vials each.

11 November (D+3): The morning was spent moving from one house to the next finding little. I received a radio call ordering us to return to the firm base and to prepare to move to a new AO (Area of Operation) within the city. We were to move to the Hydra Mosque, which had just been captured by Iraqi commandos. Our move aboard a section of "tracks" was uneventful. We arrived at the mosque and it was apparent there had been heavy fighting. There were bandages and blood trails all over the place. My company, along with Marines, was to occupy Hydra Mosque until the 5th Bn of the Iraqi Army arrived to take possession. My company's mission would be to establish a security position controlling the major intersection of blocks 501, 502, 224 and 223. I was also warned that sniper and small-arms fire was still present throughout the area.

About 1730, found a three-story house with clear fields of view and fire. Sgt Hayden led a team across the intersection to secure the building, and the rest of the company made the dash across in twos. A few potshots were taken at us but no-one was hit. I established my CP on the roof, which had a high parapet. I placed my panel marker on the northern and eastern walls, along with an IR strobe in the center so that Coalition troops and aircraft would know our position.

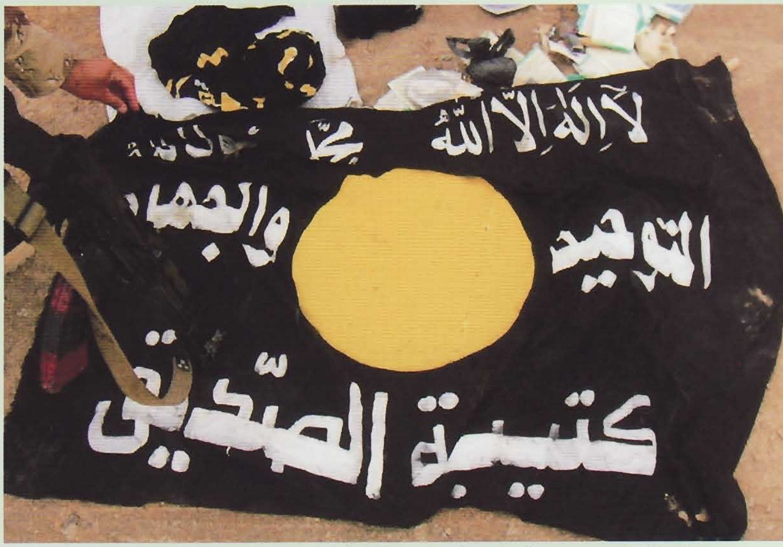
In the evening a loud and intense firefight broke out. We could observe both incoming and outgoing tracer fire. At the same time B Co had started moving to a new location, and almost immediately its lead platoon came under fire. Thus we had two intense battles going on either side of us. My lookout reported figures moving in between houses heading in our direction. I put the company on alert, placing my best shooters up on the roof with me. By now we were taking fire along the western side of the roof - you could hear the rounds flying over our heads. Sgt Hayden spotted some movement on a rooftop a few houses down. I took a look through the binoculars and could see three insurgents taking shots at us from behind some metal vents. I told Sgt Hayden he could shoot once he had a clear shot. I also took up a position and waited for the insurgents to make the next move. One of them stood up to aim his weapon and Sgt Hayden hit him in the chest. I took careful aim at the door leading from the roof and fired two quick bursts as the other two made a dash for the door, striking one in the legs. After this, everything turned quiet.

I had just started to relax a little when the southern wall of the roof was hit by machine gun fire. Sgt Hayden stuck his head over the wall and reported movement on patios two houses over from ours in an adjacent street. We had an exchange of gunfire and I yelled down the staircase to have someone bring me my backpack where I had some grenades. Two Iraqi soldiers took turns firing back at the insurgents while I gave quick instructions to Sgt Hayden and Lt Iraq on how to throw the grenades. I got everyone together and told them that after the next burst of fire from the insurgents we would stand and throw the grenades while everyone else fired their AKs. At the right time, the eight of us stood up, fired, threw the grenades, and immediately took cover. There were four loud explosions and some yelling. We all stood up and fired into the insurgent positions. One of the houses started to burn and there was no more incoming fire from that direction. From my position on the roof I could see the two Hummers coming down the road. I quickly ran out to meet them and grabbed additional grenades. I was surprised to see a major exit the vehicle; this Maj was from the Marine Corps Lab on Lessons Learned (MCWLL). This short episode was covered in Bing West's book, "No True Glory."

12 November (D+4): At 0430 the Maj woke me and we immediately started planning for the arrival of the LAVs that were to escort us to B Co, 1/3's location. Warpig 6 arrived as planned and off we went. The vehicles maintained a steady rate with us trotting alongside. We passed in front of the Hydra Mosque before arriving at B Co's location.

We started our latest advance at 0800. As soon as we began moving we came across insurgents hiding in houses almost adjacent to the company's CP. In the first three houses we captured eight insurgents, including one that had recently had a leg amputated. We uncovered more foreign passports, medication and hard drugs. We discovered another house with fresh graves dug in the courtyard. Some of the bodies were still visible, all wearing load-bearing vests, some still containing AK magazines. Just as

The M1114 Humvee belonging to MSgt. Andreas Elesky, senior advisor to the 2nd Company of the 5th Battalion. (MSgt. Andreas Elesky, USMC)



This flag was seized when a lair of al-Zarqawi was discovered. This item had been used in the gruesome beheading videos that al-Zarqawi's terrorist network specialized in. (MSgt. Andreas Elesky, USMC)

Sgt Hayden turned the corner the lead squad came under machine gun fire from a house across the clearing in block 419. We returned fire, suppressing the house, but we were also receiving sniper fire from our right front. We were in the process of trying to backtrack and move into the house behind us when all hell broke loose in 2nd Plt's area. The firing was so intense that rounds were penetrating the houses behind us - we were receiving friendly fire to our rear and our front was pinned down by insurgent fire. The firing eventually died down and we returned to the morning's jumping off positions. I led my company back to the house and had them redistribute ammunition and clean weapons.

13 November (D+5): Today we again tried to take a mosque located in block 437. Our plan was the same as yesterday but now we had LAV, 81mm mortar and artillery support. A Marine platoon was occupying houses facing the mosque as they provided over-watch for our movement across the open area to the target. We had a Javelin set up for a shot at the minaret in case a sniper decided to show himself. Exactly five minutes later the "tracks" started to move and the LAV moved into position in the intersection. Marines were reporting on the radio that insurgents were running out of the back heading south across PL Fran. Looking around the corner, I saw the lead "track" knock over the perimeter wall to the mosque compound. This was our signal to move, so I yelled at the Iraqis to follow and took off. One "track" had entered the compound and the other was sitting atop the outer wall. I scrambled over the wall and took up a position next to the AAV. I looked around and noticed I was the only person inside the compound. Over my shoulder I noticed a couple of Iraqi soldiers lying on the ground and others trying to climb over the top of them. Eventually I had two squads entering the compound. I signaled to Sgt Hayden to lead his squad through the doors on the right, while I took a squad through the left. It took us 20 minutes to search and secure the entire mosque. We found a small weapons cache and a load of pre-recorded propaganda tapes.

14 November (D+6): We arrived in our new area about 0830. The insurgents' favorite accessory must have been black AK load-bearing vests, since all the dead were wearing them. The remainder of the day was spent setting up our perimeter and improving our firm base. We were surprised when two "tracks" full of hygiene packs and food (including fresh fruit) arrived, so we could get cleaned and even get some mail. In the evening I spent some time talking to Marines and exchanging stories about what had happened so far. I learned that I gave the Marines a pretty good laugh with my charge into the mosque. They told me they'd never seen a master sergeant run so fast! Thinking about it I had to chuckle because I did wonder why I was the only one inside the compound at the time. I learned from the Iraqi soldiers that the PKM gunner tripped over his ammo belt and caused the pile up I had witnessed at the wall.

15 November (D+7): At 0600, everyone was in a good mood and eager to get moving. We moved into block 232 with an engineer team, coming across a bombed-out safe house with 15 dead insurgents lying around. From the look of things, they were caught in the open while setting up a roadblock. The damage looked like it was caused by a gunship.

17 November (D+9): I was totally bored having done nothing the previous day, though a patrol was scheduled for today. We were at the southeast edge of block 346 facing PL Cathy when one of my Iraqi soldiers pointed to a dead body inside a walled compound of a three-story warehouse. We set up a perimeter and approached the body carefully. A CA Marine was checking the body when I noticed a blasting cap and detcord lying in front of it. I cut the cord and followed it into a large room filled with explosives and artillery shells - we had stumbled on a VBIED factory. We found commercial shipping containers with hundreds of RPG rounds, hundreds of thousands of AK ammo rounds, drugs, hijacked Red Cross supplies, food shipments - just about anything you could think of. In one container we discovered flags of one of al-Zarqawi's brigades, along with some original beheading videos and CDs. We immediately called this in to the B Co CO, and before we knew it, we had CI teams swarming al-Zarqawi's compound. We even had Gen Natonski swing by and talk to us. We discovered so many different types and quantities of explosives that the engineers had us call in an EOD team. They arrived at 1400 and had me request a D9 dozer to dig a hole for us to destroy the RPGs and small arms in. The EOD team would detonate all of the heavy explosives inside the warehouse, hoping the building would shield some of the blast. My company spent the 17th and 18th guarding this site. The evening of the 18th saw the site prepped and ready to blow. The engineers evacuated everyone back to the Hydra Mosque, where the EOD team ran the detcord. It's hard to describe how the blast felt, but the shockwave caused the minaret to move in a wave-like fashion, and it turned night into day.

19 November (D+11): This was my last day assigned to the Marine company inside the city of Fallujah. My Iraqis were moved by truck to man the main checkpoint leading into the city. I remained at this checkpoint until replaced by an Army advisor team.

My time in Iraq had come to an end - I departed Fallujah on 6 December, arriving home on the 10th. I'd like to dedicate this story to all the advisors who were killed and couldn't make that journey home. There was a really close friend I made, SSgt Todd Cornell from Fraser, Michigan. A reservist from 1-339 IN, he was killed in house-to-house fighting.

Semper Fi
Andreas J. Elesky
MSgt USMC (Ret.)

National Elections

On 30 January 2005, Iraq held its first democratic election in more than 50 years, with millions of Iraqis turning out to cast their votes for a 275-member National Assembly and an interim president. However, the turnout in many Sunni areas was less than 8%. The world watched with bated breath, expecting widespread bloodshed from terrorist attacks in accordance with what they had threatened - to "wash the streets in blood." Security at the 5000 polling stations around Iraq was undertaken by local police and the ING, plus Coalition troops such as Marines. Many days were spent making contingency plans, and joint forces established a security clampdown in the days leading up to the elections.

Marine aircraft and ground forces helped transport Independent Electoral Commission workers and materials around the more remote areas of Al Anbar province. One squad leader reported that his unit traveled more than 1600km escorting electoral convoys in the three days leading up to the election, allowing a total of only six hours of sleep for the whole period. Coalition forces provided an outer security cordon, while Iraqi personnel manned inner security rings to ensure polling sites were kept safe. On election day, all movement of private vehicles was banned nationwide to prevent VBIED (Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Device) suicide attacks. The result was that in most parts of Iraq, citizens were able to vote freely, though there were still more than 100 armed attacks.

Combat engineers wearing NOMEX suits from the 24th MEU use an AN/PSS-12 mine detector to search for buried weapons and munitions in Jabella on 19 January 2005. The AN/PSS-12 weighs just 3.8kg and is capable of detecting metallic objects as small as a firing pin buried 50cm underground. This raid marked the beginning of Operation Checkmate, an offensive designed to disrupt militant activity ahead of national elections. (USMC)

طريق مغلق
يمنع الدخول
طريق مؤقت

In Al Anbar province, Marines manned checkpoints, conducted air patrols, and stood up QRFs. Fortunately, these QRFs were not required, although there were scattered cases of suicide and mortar attacks, especially in Baghdad[2]. Many Marines interviewed considered the election to be a highlight of their deployment, since they were able to contribute to this small step in Iraq's path towards democracy. It was obviously a highlight for many Iraqis too, many of them bringing their children to witness this historic event.

On 13 February 2005, provisional election results were released, revealing that 8,456,266 Iraqis had voted, or 58% of the total eligible population. The United Iraqi Alliance, backed by the Shiite leader, Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, had topped the list with 48.19% of the vote. This was followed by the Democratic Patriotic Alliance of Kurdistan with 25.73%. However, Kurdish and Shiite areas had far better turnouts than Sunni-dominated areas. In fact, in Al Anbar province in the heart of the "Sunni Triangle", less than 2% of eligible voters (just 3775 people!) cast their votes. This was principally because local insurgents had promised to kill any who dared to vote.

Prior to national elections on January 30, six battalions of Iraqi troops and two battalions of police were stationed in Fallujah. They worked side by side with three U.S. Marine battalions and an RCT HQ stationed in Fallujah to oversee ongoing security operations and to provide humanitarian assistance. In Ar Ramadi, however, the status quo remained. Loose collections of gangs threatened and cajoled, with the entire police force abandoning their posts before the January elections.

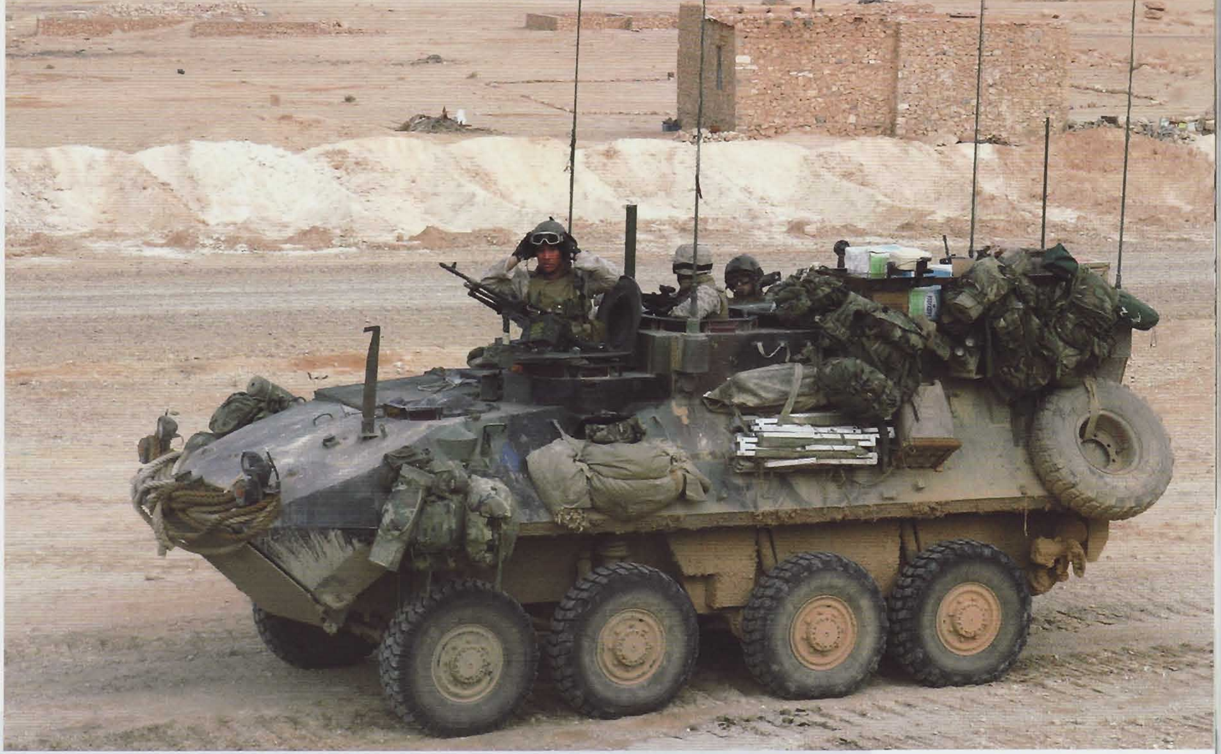
---

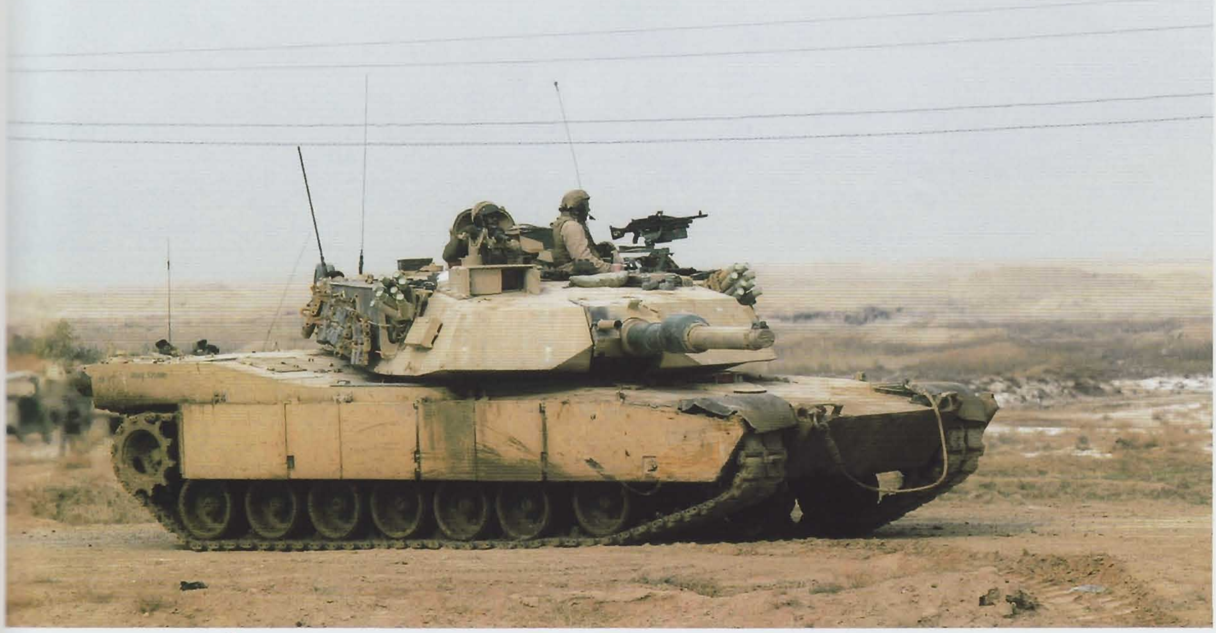
[2] Journalists reported that 44 people were killed on election day, including nine suicide bombers.

A youthful looking "jundi" from D Company, 505th Battalion, poses with his AK-47 assault rifle during a joint patrol with Weapons Company, 3/1 Marines. The initials "CDC" on his breast pocket stand for "Civil Defense Corps". The CPA (Coalition Provisional Authority) planned to deploy at least 12,000 trained Iraqi soldiers by September 2004, but the actual number achieved was less than half this. (USMC)

Engineers of Charlie Company, CSSB-7 (Combat Service Support Battalion), unload road signs near Baghdadi before national elections on 30 January 2005. On the left is an AAV with its turret traversed to the rear, while on the right is a truck-trailer unit carrying a TRAM (Tractor, Rubber-tired, Articulated steering, Multipurpose). (USMC)

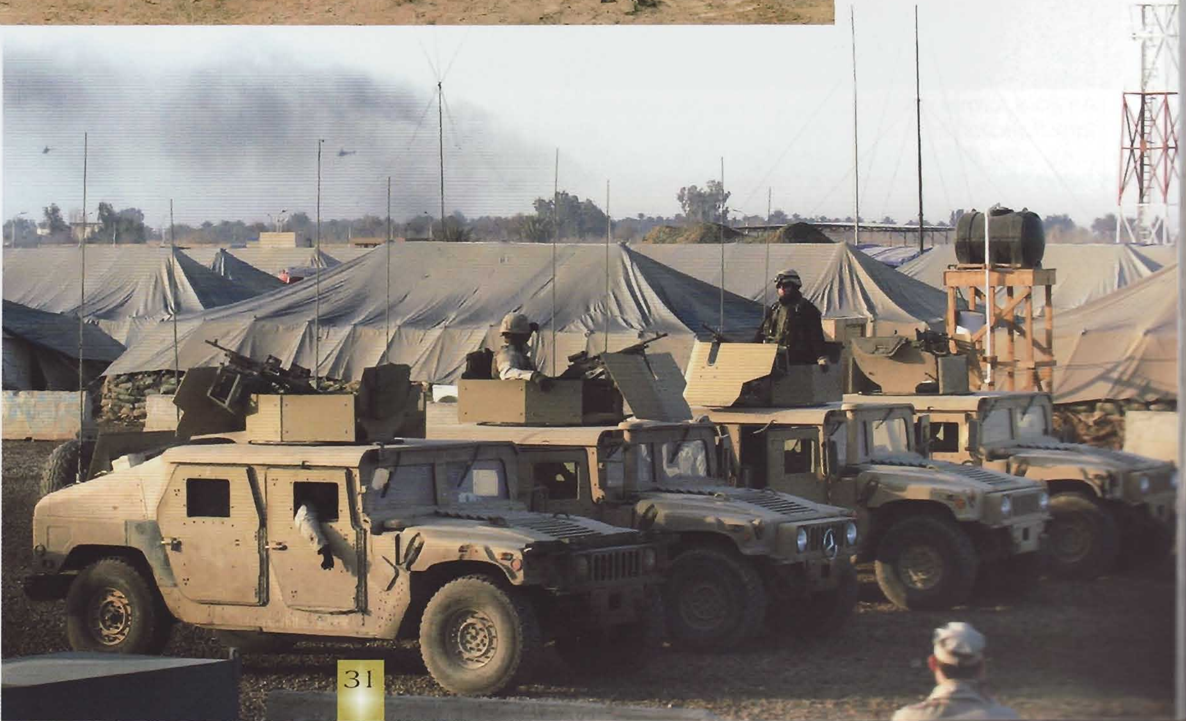
This LAV-C is attached to 1/23 Marines, and is patrolling a polling station set up in Haqlaniyah. The LAV-C is a command and control vehicle fitted with a suite of radios. The date is 28 January 2005, two days before the election. This historic occasion marked Iraq's first free elections in more than 50 years. (GySgt. Kevin Williams, USMC)





This well-weathered M1A1 Abrams from "2nd Tanks" provides security near an election site at ECP 2 in Fallujah on 30 January 2005. This tank's USMC serial number "572400" is stenciled in black on the hull flanks. The loader has an M240G with butt stock and sights installed on a scissors mount at his station. This vehicle would represent a fine study for a modeler wishing to produce a well-used M1A1! (Cpl. Trevor Gift, USMC)

These M1114 Humvees belonging to NMCB-23 (Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 23) are forming up to conduct a patrol of Fallujah just days before Iraq's historic elections. Seabees were enlisted to provide additional security to Coalition camps and polling stations. Female Seabees helped screen female voters as they entered voting precincts. (Photographer's Mate 3rd Class Todd Frantom, USN)



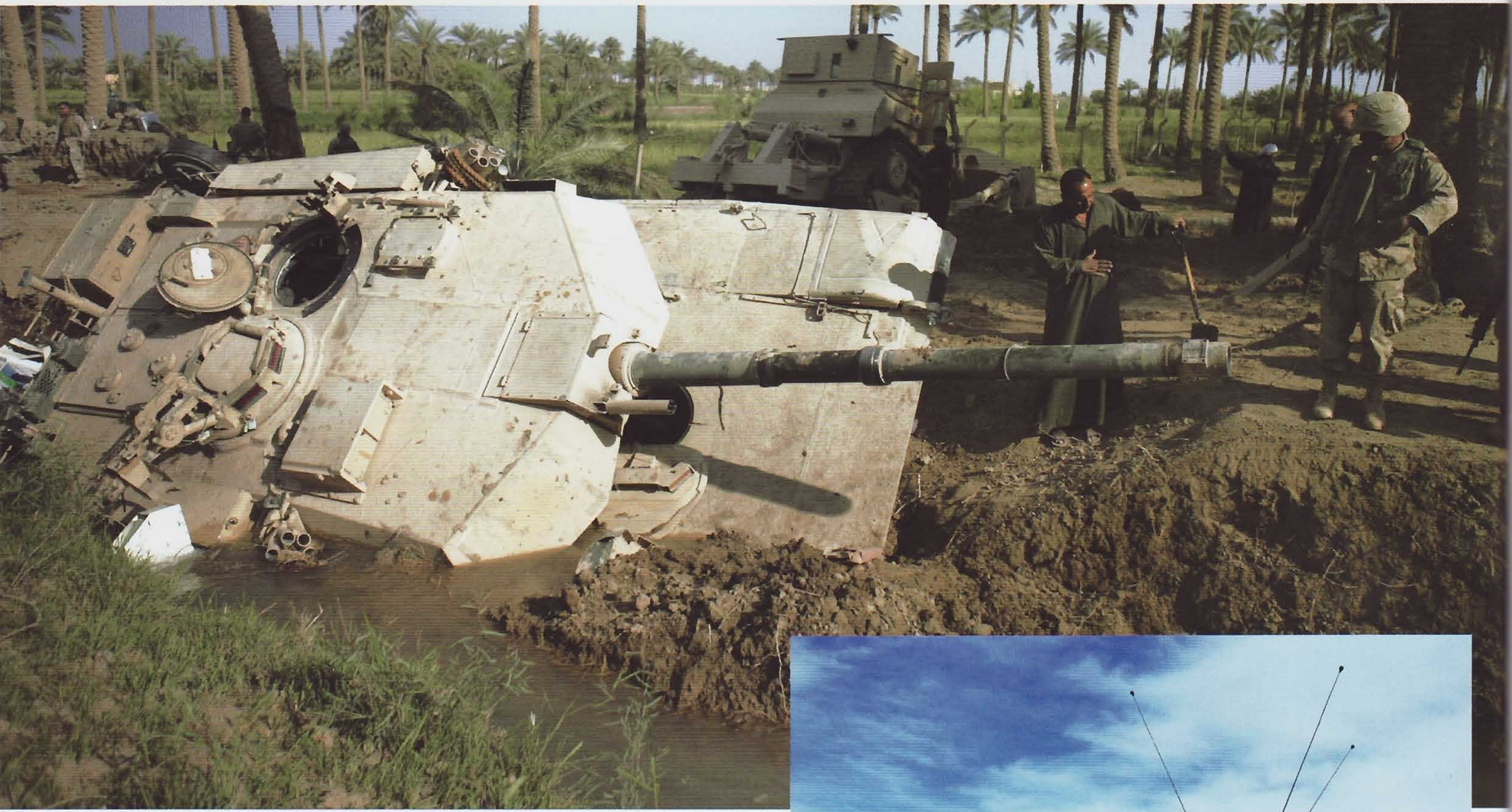
Other operations during OIF 2

There has been a succession of military operations throughout Iraq since the initial invasion of 2003, and in OIF 2, the territory of I MEF was no exception. Some of the larger operations conducted by Marines are outlined below.

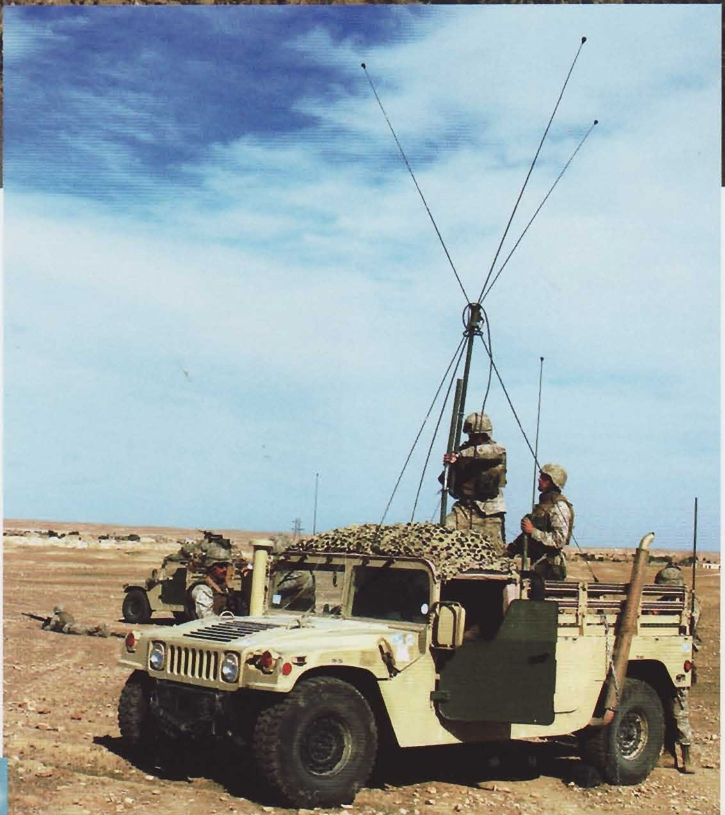
- Operation Showdown (18 August 2004)
In the first joint operation between 2/4 Marines and Iraqi Special Forces, Operation Showdown was launched in Ar Ramadi. A platoon of Iraqi Special Forces was distributed amongst Echo and Golf Companies of 2/4 Marines, and in an early morning raid, they began clearing an area of the city. Numerous automatic weapons, machine guns, a 160mm mortar, and an RPG-7 were discovered. Marines spoke highly of the Iraqi Special Forces.

- Operation Clean Sweep (23-24 August 2004)
This 48-hour mission was carried out east of Fallujah by Iraqi Special Forces and 3/1 Marines. It was the largest joint Iraqi-American operation in August. Its purpose was to eliminate safe havens and interdict movement of insurgents to and from Fallujah. It saw Coalition troops sweeping through the rural countryside in a search for insurgents transporting or selling weapons. Marines searched homes for weapons and materials used in making IEDs.

- Operation True Grit (23-24 August 2004)
At 2:30am, Iraqi Special Forces raided an Ar Ramadi mosque after coming under fire while on a routine patrol. A search of the mosque uncovered mines, mortar rounds, automatic weapons and terrorist propaganda. This discovery launched Operation True Grit, a joint operation between Iraqi commandos, U.S. Army soldiers and Marines from the 1st MarDiv. This operation was successful in disrupting insurgent activity in an area of escalating violence in Ar Ramadi, and led to the arrest of 17 insurgents.

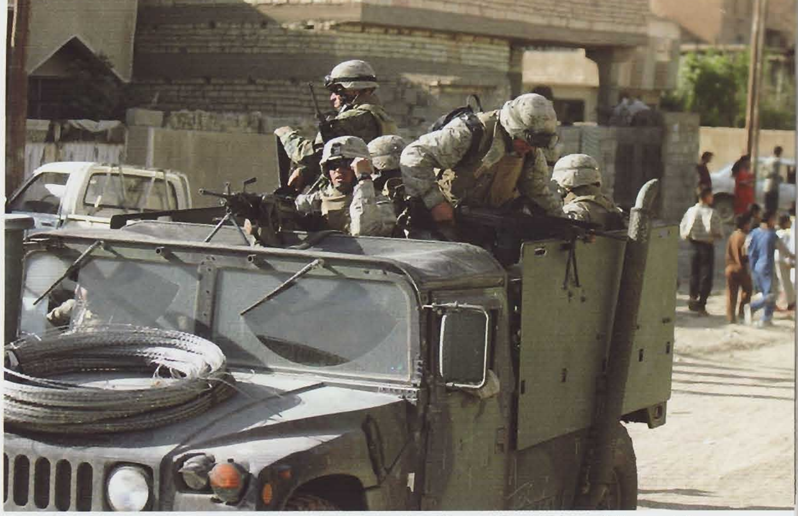


An Iraqi farmer offers advice on how to recover this M1A1 of the 1st Tank Battalion from an irrigation canal. The tank was stuck here for two days after the bank collapsed under its weight. This vehicle and its "wing" tank were moving to attack insurgents after a convoy of 2/1 Marines was ambushed on 8 April. The crew-served weapons and main gun bore evacuator have been removed. A D7 bulldozer with an MCAP kit can be seen in the background. (SSgt. Bill Lisbon, USMC)



Marines of Kilo Company, 3/4 Battalion, on 16 March, soon after their arrival in Iraq. Their two-door M1038 Humvee has an OE-254 omni-directional bi-conical antenna erected, an item designed for transmission and reception operations from 30-88MHz. Note the shipping and barcode inventory labels affixed to the vehicle side forward of the door. (LCpl. Kevin Quihuis Jr., USMC)

A gunnery sergeant guides an M88A2 HERCULES into position in an attempt to salvage the half-submerged Abrams. With 85.3m of cable length, the M88A2's main winch is rated to pull 63,504kg, enough to extract this M1A1 Abrams. CSSB-1 is in charge of the salvage operation, with the recovery process eventually taking 4½ days. (SSgt. Bill Lisbon, USMC)



This Cargo and Troop Carrier Humvee bristles with MGs, while add-on armor plates protect the cargo bay. The extended exhaust pipe on the left and the extended air intake on the right side of the hood are distinguishing marks of a USMC Humvee. This vehicle belongs to Echo Company, 2/2 Marines. (USMC)

- Operation Hurricane (16 September 2004)

This clearing operation took place in a sector of Ar Ramadi by the 2nd BCT attached to the 1st MarDiv. The aim was to disrupt the Daham terrorist network, suspected of having links with the fugitive Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Four insurgents and six IEDs were captured. There was an associated precision strike against a compound in the village of Qaryat ar Rufishin, southeast of Fallujah. Up to 60 insurgents were killed in what was thought to be a meeting of Abu Musab Zarqawi's terrorist group.

- Operation Hurricane II (18 September 2004)

This continuation of the previous operation was launched at 3:00a.m in another suburb of Ar Ramadi. Soldiers and Marines of the 2nd BCT continued to search for illegal weapons and members of the Daham terrorist network. Marines drove through central Ar Ramadi with loudspeakers mounted on their Humvees, warning insurgents to surrender or face an assault. As a result, many panicked residents fled the city. Meanwhile, Marines massed in the city center in an area that once hosted insurgents who boldly patrolled through the streets.

- Operation Longhorn (30 September 2004)

Launched in the Ar Ramadi region, Operation Longhorn was designed to capture insurgents or deny them sanctuary by keeping them on the run. "We will not abandon Iraqi cities and see them suffer the same fate as Fallujah," stated one officer. This mission successfully drove out a number of insurgents and it was conducted by the 2nd BCT, an Army brigade assigned to the 1st MarDiv and based at Camp Blue Diamond. A Marine infantry battalion augmented Army personnel.

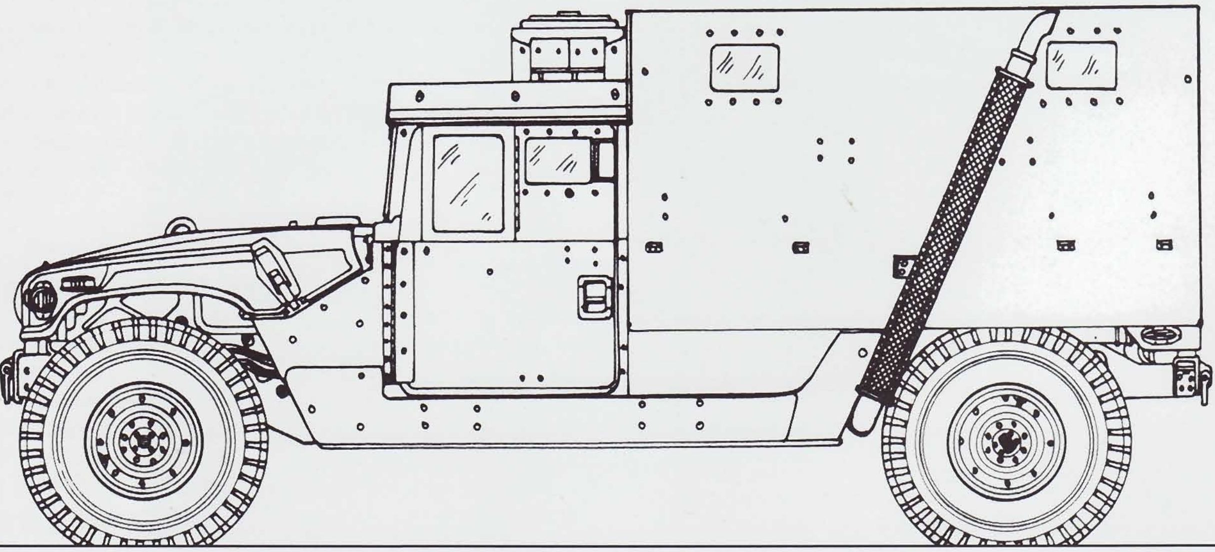
- Operation Bulldog (8-13 October 2004)

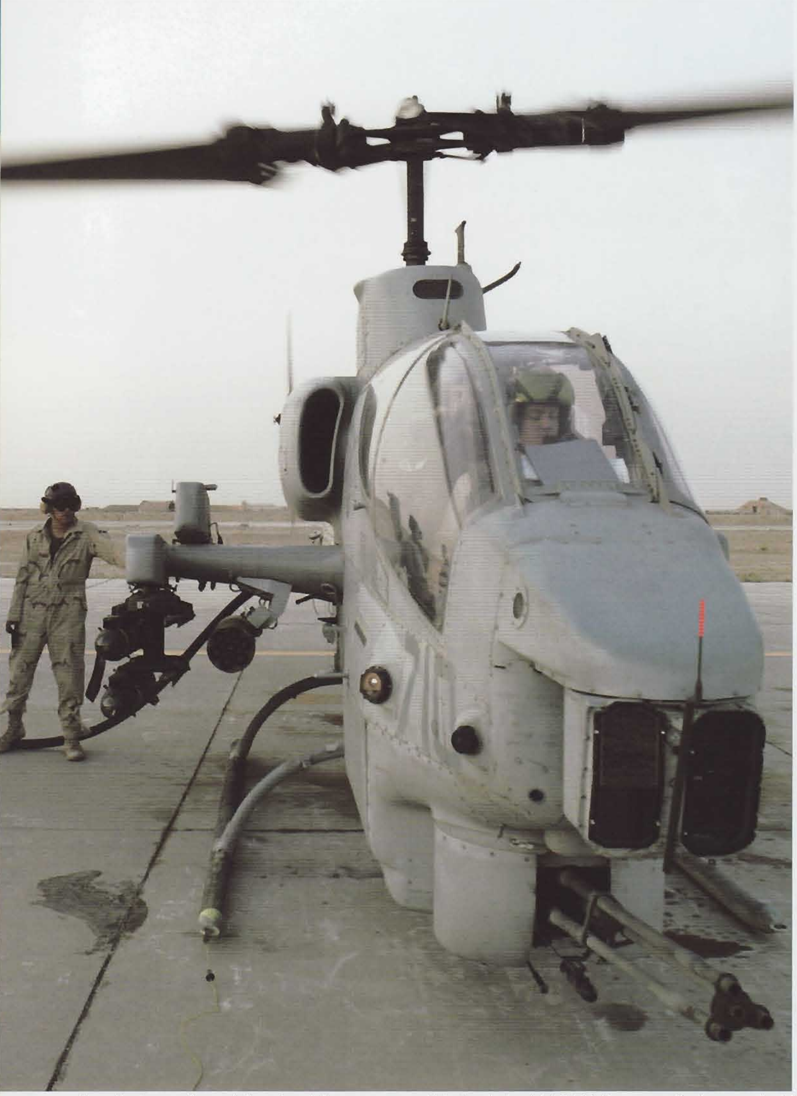
This was a continuation of Operation Longhorn, and involved the same units operating in the troubled city of Ar Ramadi. "We are determined to maintain our foothold in this city and drive out those who choose to disrupt peace and stability here," stated a spokesman from the 2nd BCT. The operation netted 75 insurgents plus numerous weapons and munitions.

- Fallujah (14 October 2004 onwards)

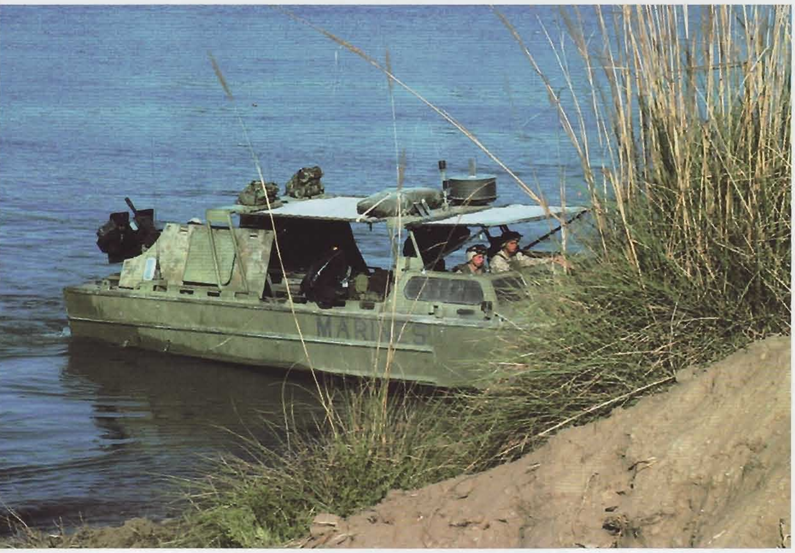
In the lead-up to The Second Battle of Fallujah, Marines launched security operations around the city. Vehicle checkpoints were set up, and searches

HMMWV

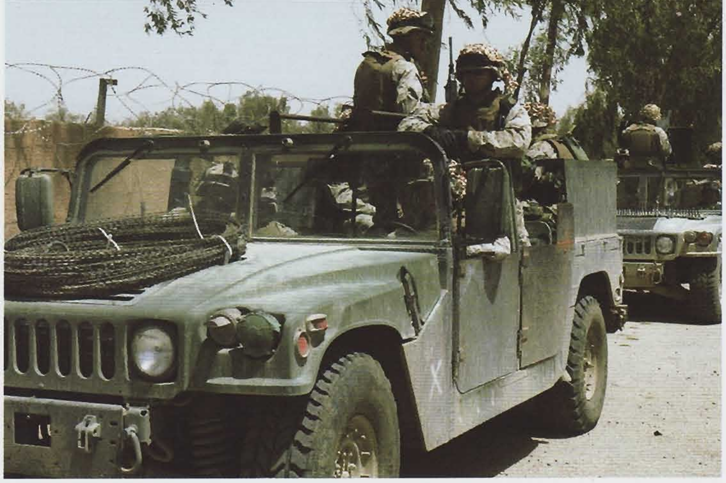




A pilot waits while fuel is pumped into his AH-1W Super Cobra at Al Taqqadum Airbase on 29 April. The bulk refueling specialist on the left is from MWSS-374 (Marine Wing Support Squadron). Air support during Operation al-Fajr came from fixed wing aircraft with FACs (Forward Air Controllers) identifying targets for precision bombing. Super Cobras worked the flanks, unable to venture downtown because of the danger posed by insurgent air defenses. (SSgt. Houston White Jr., USMC)



At last, a photo of Marines in their natural element – water! The Small Craft Company from Camp Lejeune is helping clear islands in one of Al Anbar province's numerous waterways on 22 May. Here, one of their RACs (Riverine Assault Craft) with a 40mm grenade launcher has beached. The RAC is 10.66m long and has a top speed of 68.8km/h. An interesting up-armoring approach is observable on the stern. (USMC)



A joint patrol has just been completed in Nassir Wa Al Salaam in mid-May. The Marines in their M1038 Humvees are from Charlie Company, 1/5 Battalion. Of interest is the ad hoc arrangement of rusting 3/16-inch HHS armor panels installed on the doors. (Sgt. Jose Guillen, USMC)

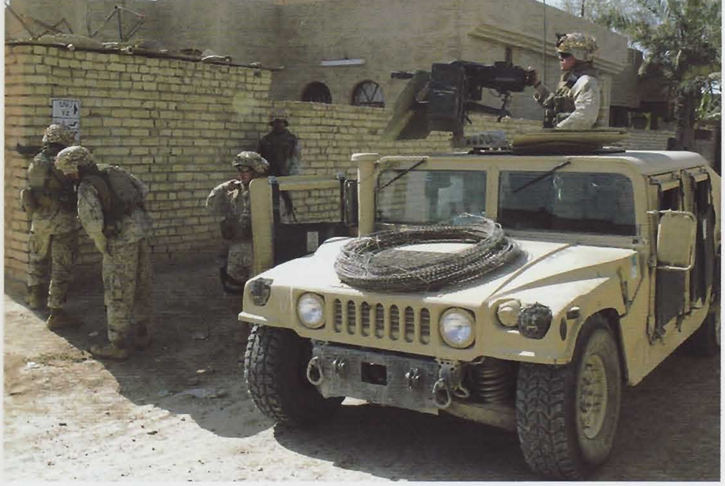
were carried out to disrupt terrorist activities. The tempo was stepped up even further on 17 October with targeted missile strikes on identified hideouts. At this time, terrorist leader Abu Musab Zarqawi was suspected of being holed up in Fallujah.

- Operation Plymouth Rock (23 November – 1 December)
This large operation involved around 5000 troops, including members of the 24th MEU, British troops, and Iraqi personnel. It took place in northern Babil province in the wake of Operation al-Fajr in Fallujah. It was believed many insurgents had slipped out of Fallujah before the cordon was established and had escaped along "rat lines" towards the south. The British "Black Watch" Regiment was positioned to block off this escape route along the Euphrates River, while Marines pushed in from the east and south. It kicked off with an Iraqi SWAT team backed by 24th MEU elements sweeping through Jabella, a town 80km south of Baghdad. A total of 204 insurgents were captured (including some important characters) and 11 arms caches were seized. This was part of efforts to disrupt insurgents ahead of national elections scheduled for January 2005.

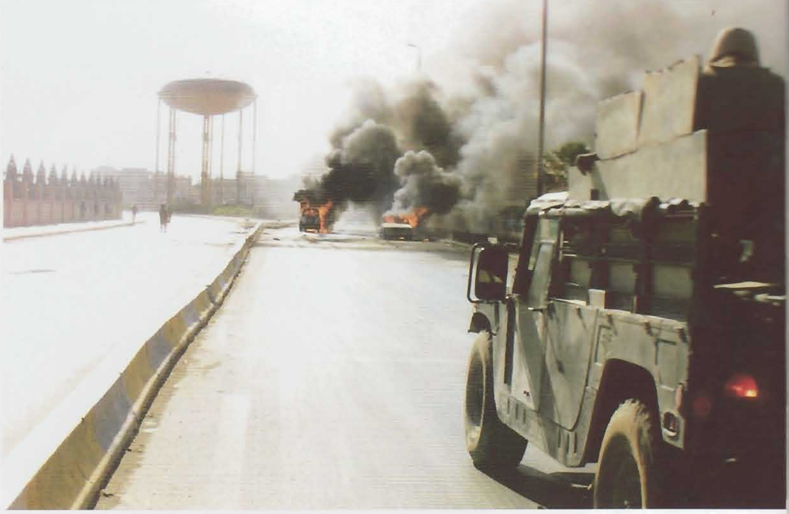
- Operation Wonderland (21-24 December 2004)
This operation netted 29 suspected insurgents near the city of Ar Ramadi. Marines from the 1st MarDiv raided 48 different sites and discovered numerous weapons caches that included antitank mines, mortar and artillery rounds.

- Operation Checkmate (19 January 2005)
With national elections due to take place on 30 January, this operation commenced with a pre-dawn assault by the Force Reconnaissance Platoon of the 24th MEU, an Iraqi SWAT team, and U.S. Army personnel. Half a dozen CH-46E Sea Knight helicopters delivered the troops to Jabella. They stormed a village, and with support from additional Marine forces, detained 15 suspects and captured a cache containing 11 weapons and 1500 rounds of ammunition. Other raids took place in conjunction with this operation in an effort to improve security before the election. "When we have an enemy on the run, especially a determined one, we can't afford to stand around admiring our progress," said one spokesman. "We have to stay in the attack."

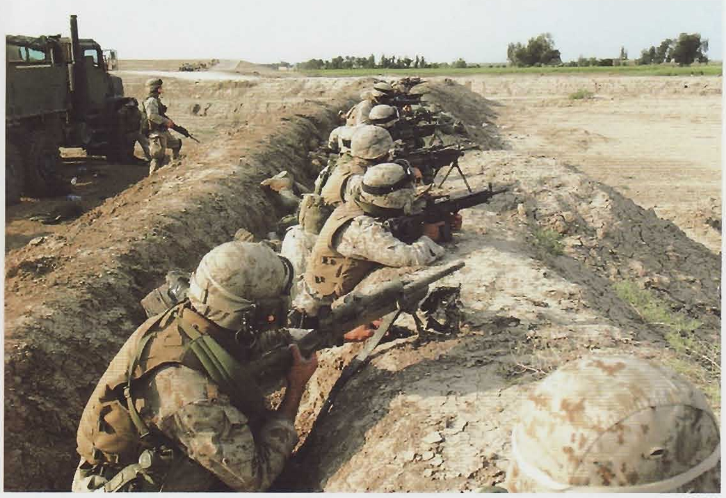
- Operation River Blitz (20 February - 5 March 2005)
This major operation kicked off in Ar Ramadi, in conjunction with an 8:00pm – 6:00am curfew. After the 'conquest' of Fallujah, much of the violent unrest had transferred to Ar Ramadi. Operation River Blitz came about as a response to an Iraqi government request for improved security in the region after a wave of terrorist attacks killed more than 100 Iraqis. It was conducted by the 1st MarDiv and Iraqi units. Access to Ar Ramadi was controlled and restricted when checkpoints were set up. Vehicles were searched and people screened as they traveled to and from the provincial capital. Activity in Ar Ramadi was supported by increased security measures in Hit, Baghdadi and Hadithah. The operation resulted in more than 400 insurgents being arrested.



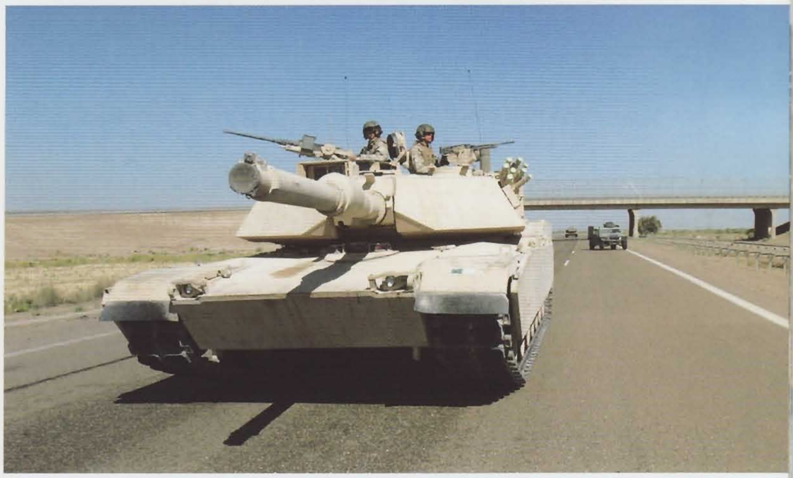
Marines press forward in a June attack in Al Kharma, a town 10km northeast of Fallujah. Their M1044 Humvee boasts a 40mm Mk.19 automatic grenade launcher, for which the maximum practical range is 1500m. Of special note are the Kevlar liners hung over the Humvee's four doors to provide further protection for passengers. (LCpl. Jordan Sherwood, USMC)



This photo taken in Ar Ramadi is noteworthy for the roughly cut makeshift armor plates welded around the cargo bed of this 2/4 Marines Humvee. An IED detonated as a Marine convoy was passing, though no personnel were injured. During OIF 2, Marines were required to improvise with armor kits, sandbags and plywood. Most up-armored M1114 Humvees were initially destined for Army units. (Sgt. Kevin Reed, USMC)

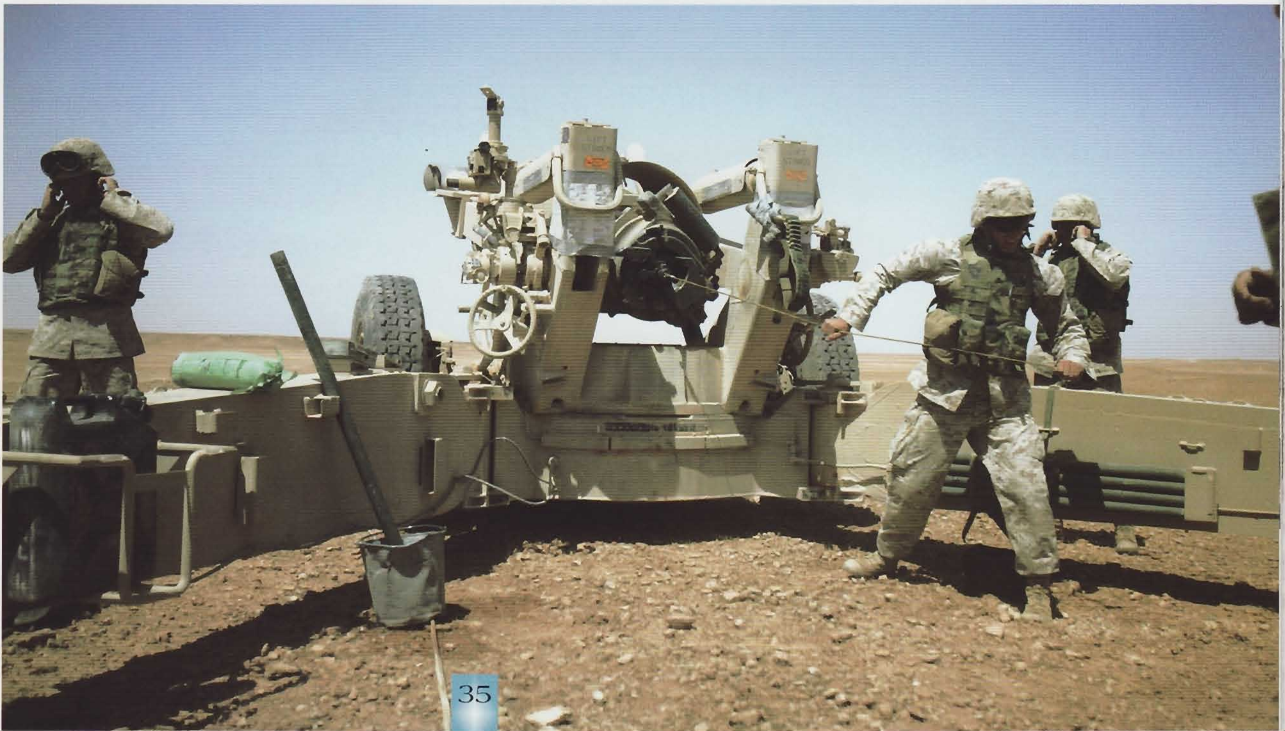


Marines of Fox Company, 2/2 Marines, occupy a trench after coming under mortar fire near the Euphrates River. Note the 7.62mm M40A1 Sniper Weapon System with 10x42 Leupold Ultra M3A telescopic sight being operated by the Marine in the center foreground. The bolt-action M40A1 has a maximum effective range of 800m. (Cpl. Shawn Rhodes, USMC)



This M1A1 Abrams, with a duct tape muzzle cover in place to keep dirt out of the gun tube, sits astride a highway near Mahmudiyah in late June. The tank belongs to Bravo Company, 1st Tank Battalion, and it is operating in support of 2/2 Marines. Note the shipping labels affixed to its front left fender. These heavily armored vehicles play a vital role in keeping MSRs (Main Supply Routes) open. (Cpl. Shawn Rhodes, USMC)

The A-gunner yanks the lanyard connected to the M35 firing mechanism, sending a 155mm HE shell flying downrange on a low trajectory. This gun crew from E Battery, 2/11 Marines, is carrying out a daylong live-fire exercise with its M198 howitzer in early June. Artillery continues to play an important role in counter-battery fire against insurgent mortar or rocket attacks. (Cpl. Macario Mora Jr., USMC)

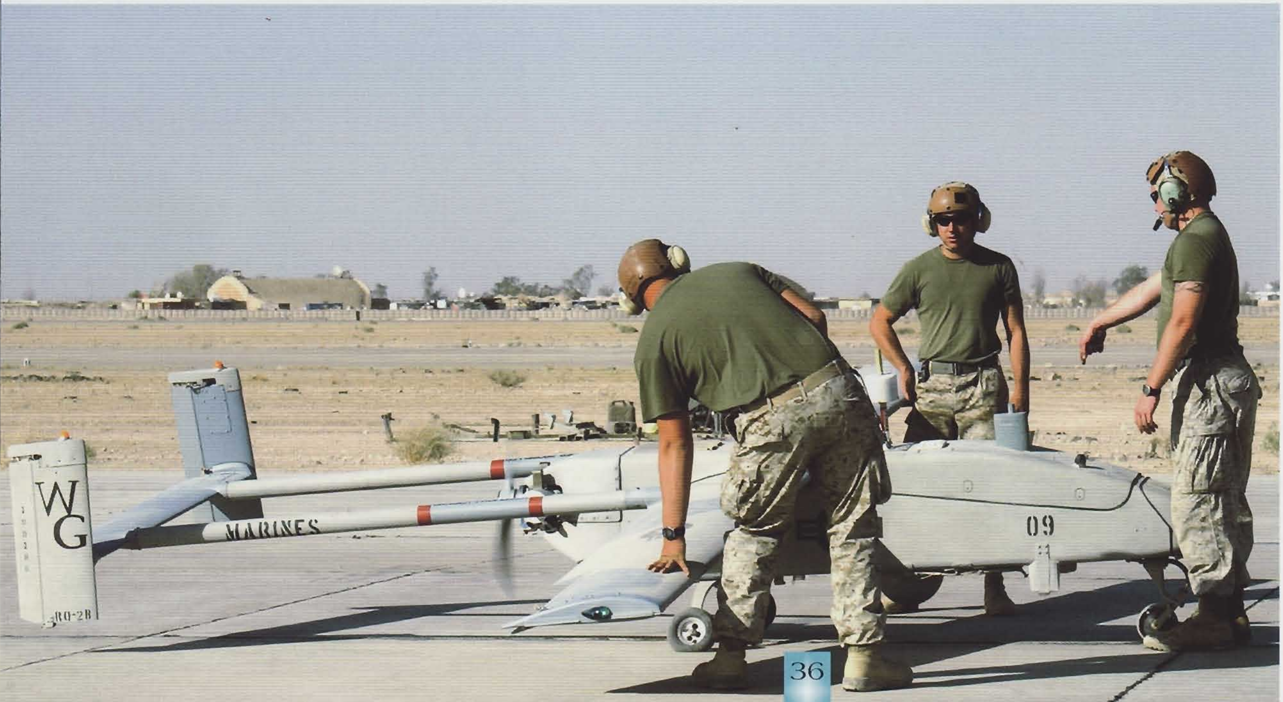


A 42.91kg HE shell is loaded into the breech of an M198 155mm howitzer. The gun is serving with E Battery, 2/11 Marines. Once a ten-digit target coordinate has been supplied by counter-fire radar or UAV, artillery can respond with devastating effect. (Cpl. Macario Mora Jr. USMC)

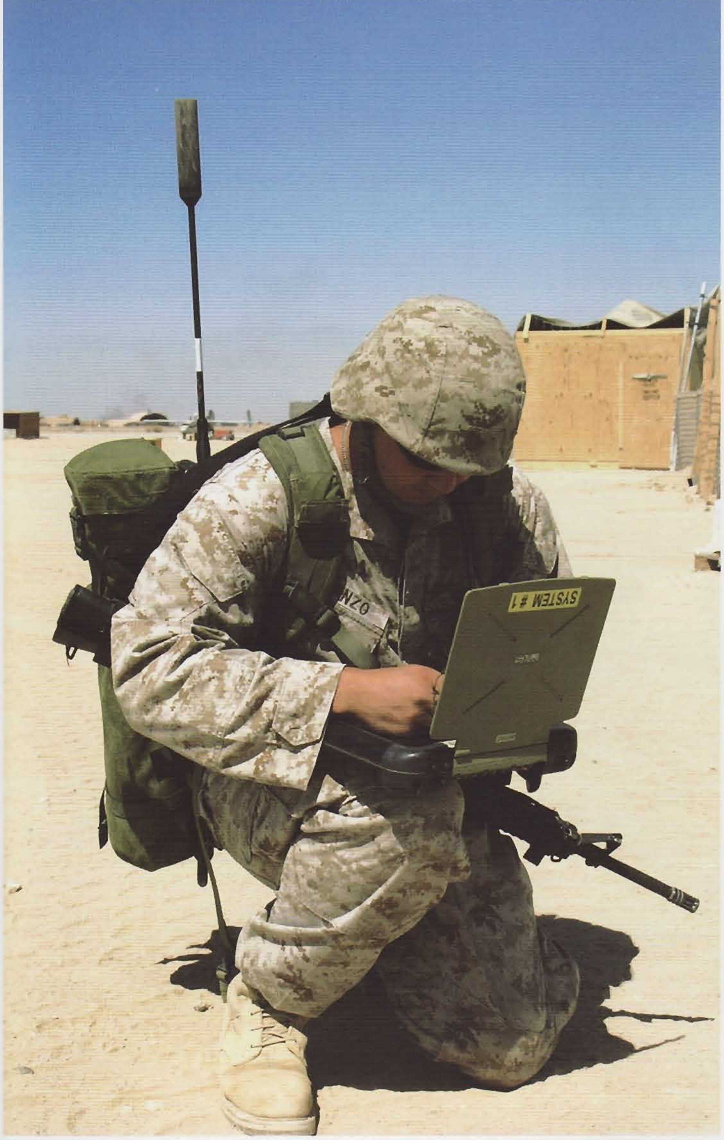
An LAV-AT acts as a sentry near a dilapidated fort in the desert near Syria. It was planned that 36 such rundown forts be rebuilt to act as security outposts to prevent smuggling and unauthorized crossings. The LAV series of vehicles has a top speed of 100km/h on roads, and vehicles can swim at 10km/h during amphibious operations. (Cpl. Randy Bernard, USMC)

Camp Al Qa'im. Pre-combat checks are made before Marines of Charlie Company, 1/7 Marines, "leave the wire" to head out on a routine patrol. The vehicle is an M1046 Humvee with the versatile TOW launcher. Its warhead is capable of blowing huge holes in buildings, and they were regularly used in the savage Fallujah fighting in November 2004. In a four-hour shootout along Phase Line Henry, Kilo Company of 3/1 Marines fired no less than 160 TOW missiles! (LCpl. Christopher Graham, USMC)

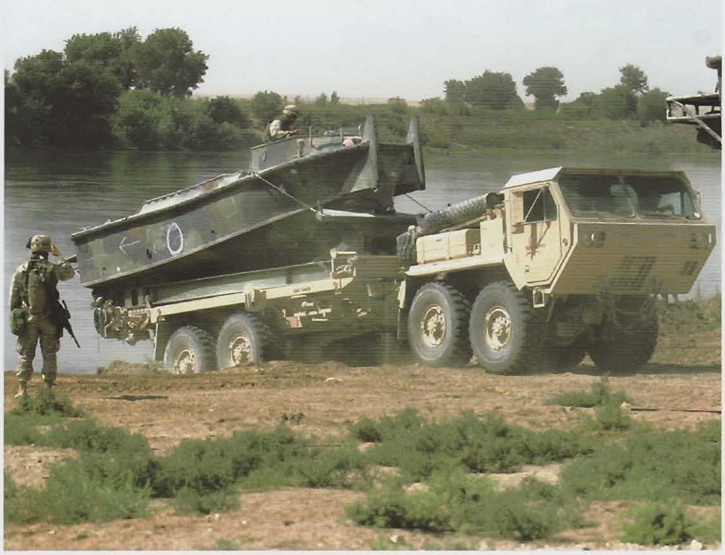
A suspect is detained in Al Karabilah in mid-September. These Marines of 2nd Platoon, Charlie Company, 1/7 Marines, are supported by a two-door M1038 Humvee with soft-top roof. Note the vehicle's improved and more heavily armored doors, plus the MG mounted in the rear. (LCpl. Christopher Graham, USMC)



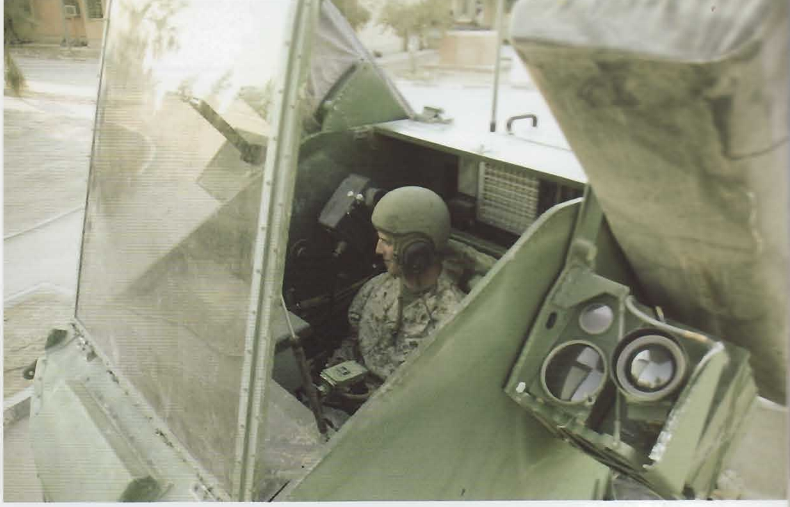
This RQ-2A Pioneer, the oldest UAV in U.S. service, is undergoing preflight inspections at Al Taqaddum Airbase in September. These airframe mechanics are from VMU-1 (Marine Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Squadron) attached to the 3rd MAW. In four months at Fallujah, VMU-1 "Watchdogs" flew more than 400 sorties with only two craft malfunctions, though several Pioneers returned with bullet holes! (Cpl. Paul Leicht, USMC)



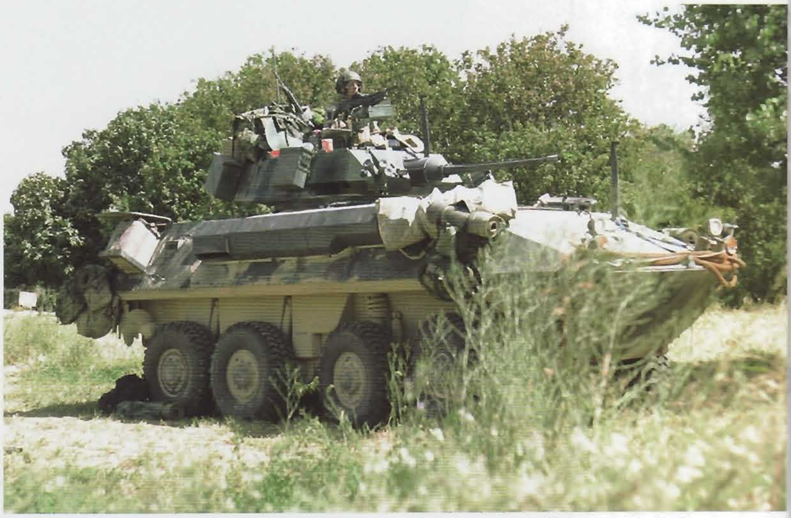
This UAV operator of VMU-1 has an MRS (Man-pack Receiving Station) for the Pioneer UAV on his back, and a screen on which to view the UAV's imagery as it cruises over the battlefield. Marines with VMU-1 commonly use the MRS for combat operations in sites such as Fallujah and Ar Ramadi. The ability of the Pioneer to loiter and "adjust" fires in real time is invaluable. (Cpl. Paul Leicht, USMC)



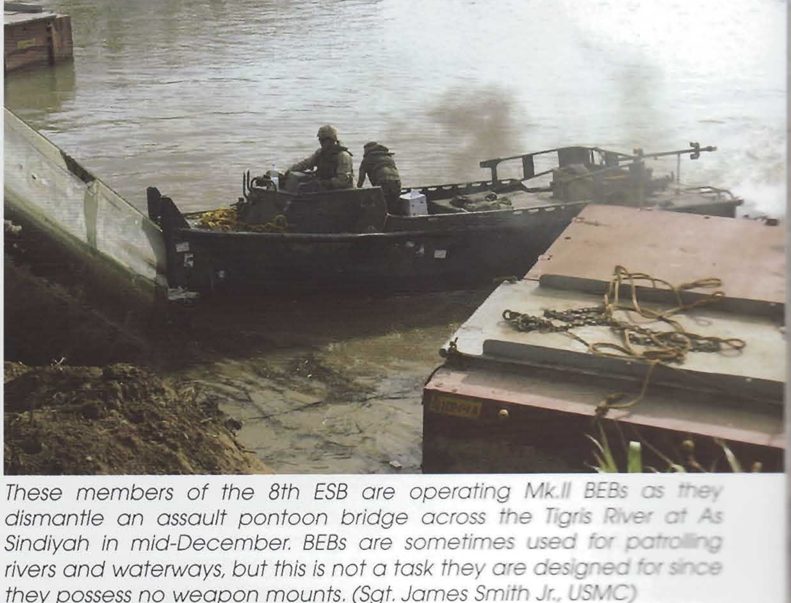
An unarmored Mk.48-18 LVS (Logistics Vehicle System) backs up to the Tigris River near Ubaydi to unload a BEB (Bridge Erection Boat). It is part of Alpha Bridge Company of the 1st FSSG, and is a combination of the Mk.48 FPU (Front Power Unit) and the Mk.18 Self-Loading Container and Ribbon Bridge Transporter. The LVS FPU and RBU (Rear Body Unit) are joined by a hydraulically powered articulated joint that permits 8-wheel drive. (USMC)



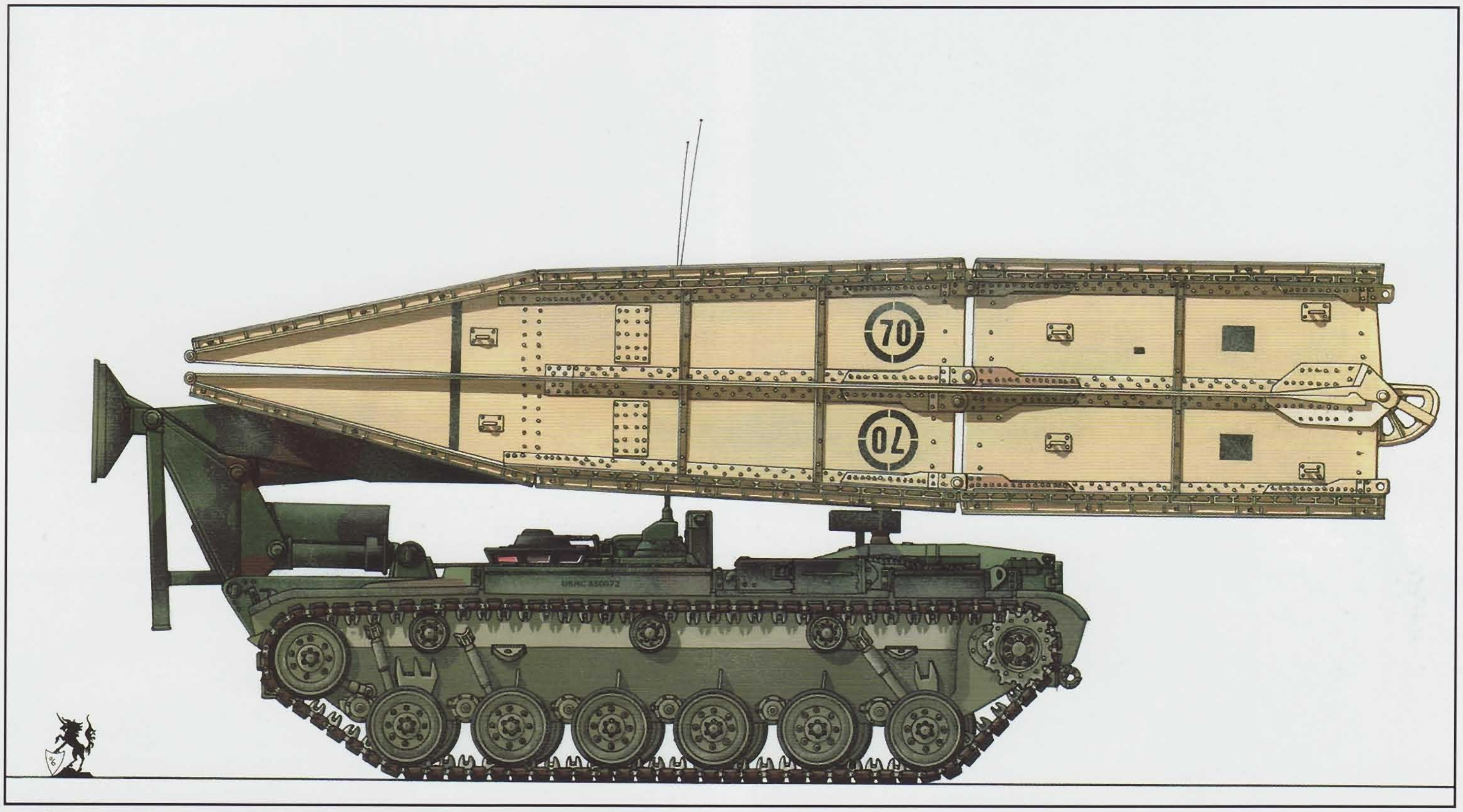
A close-up of the turret of an M1037 HMMWV Avenger. This vehicle belongs to Avenger Platoon, 4th LAAD Battalion. Here, a gunner carries out a daily maintenance check of the air-defense system. The Avenger's armament consists of eight turret-mounted Stinger SAMs and an FN Herstal SA 12.7mm M3P MG, coordinated by a complex arrangement of optical, radio, interrogator, laser rangefinder and video tracker systems in the turret. (Cpl. Joel Chaverri, USMC)



This LAV-25 of 3rd LAR Battalion provides security in Ubaydi. A homemade jerry can rack is on the side of the hull at the rear, and wire cutter posts are erected on both the hull and turret top. The style of exhaust cover reveals this vehicle has already undergone the SLEP (Service Life Extension Program) upgrade designed to keep the USMC LAV fleet operational until 2015. (SSgt. Jonathan Knauth, USMC)

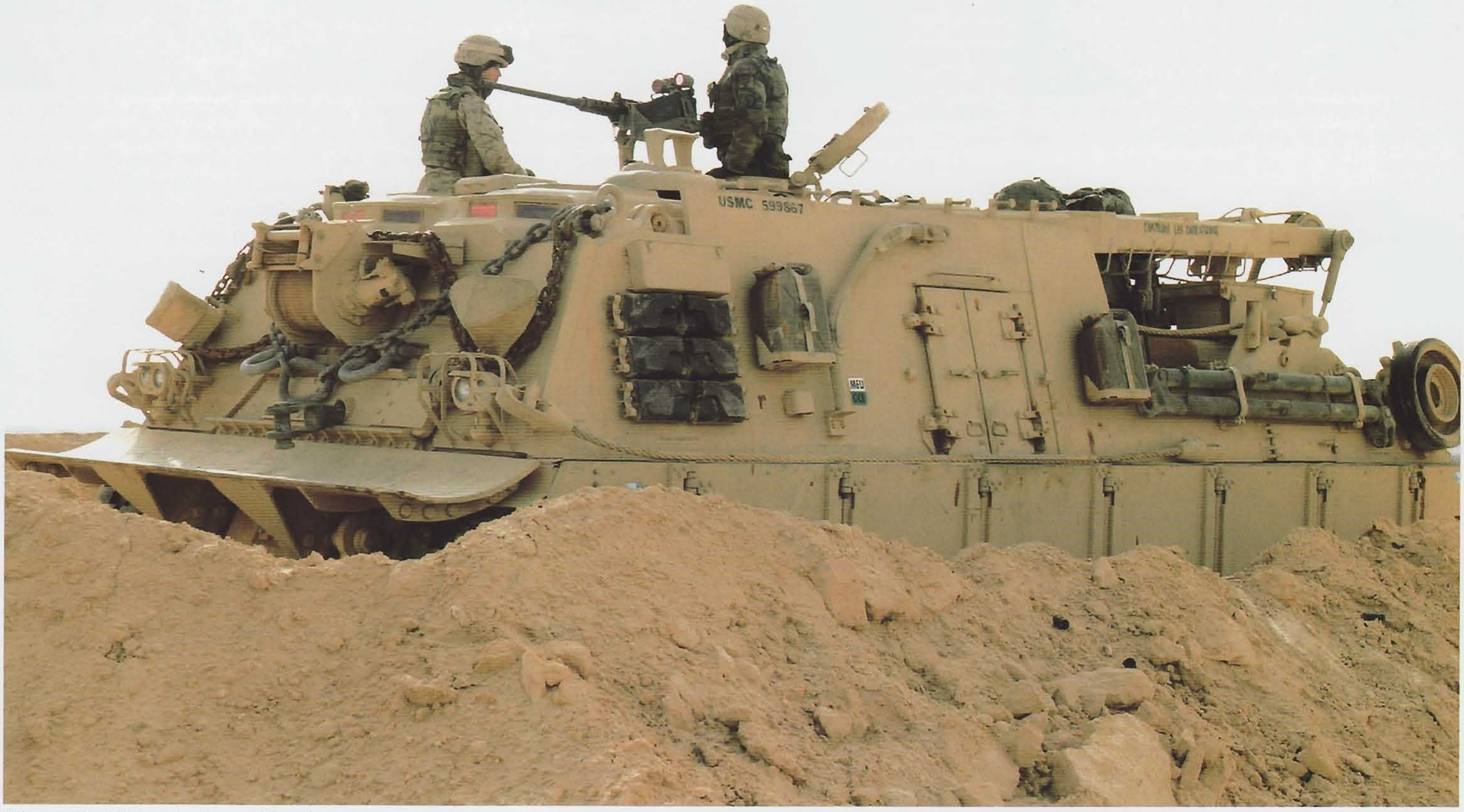


These members of the 8th ESB are operating Mk.II BEBs as they dismantle an assault pontoon bridge across the Tigris River at As Sindiyah in mid-December. BEBs are sometimes used for patrolling rivers and waterways, but this is not a task they are designed for since they possess no weapon mounts. (Sgt. James Smith Jr., USMC)



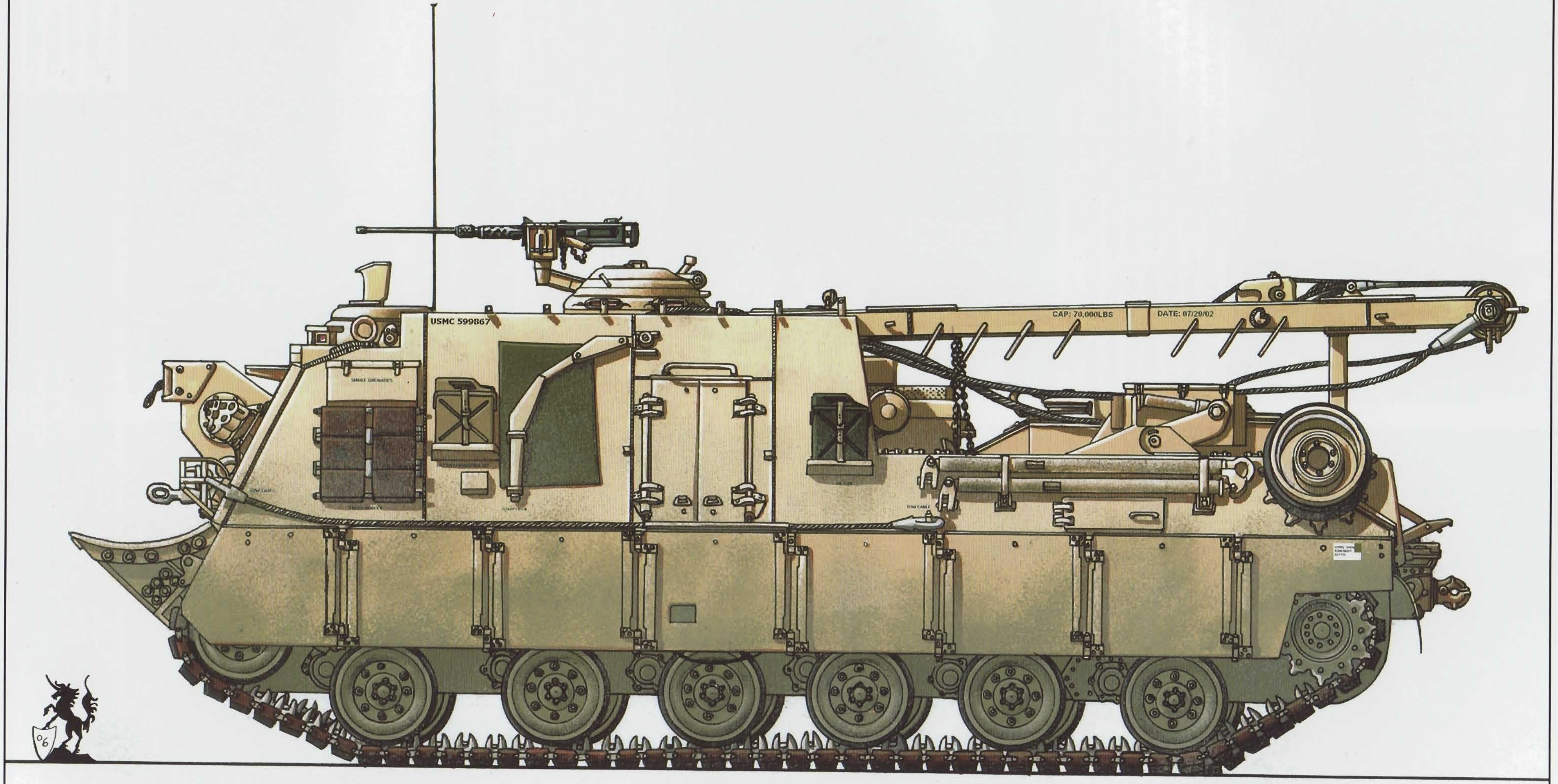
M60A1 AVLB (Armored Vehicle Launched Bridge)

This M60A1 AVLB carried a 60-foot scissors-type bridge. The circled "70" NATO weight classification sign signifies its maximum load capacity in tons. The launcher is painted in a three-color NATO camouflage scheme. The AVLB entered USMC service in the late 1980s and falls under the TO&E (Table of Organization and Equipment) of Marine tank battalions. Each USMC active-duty battalion is assigned four AVLBs and the current inventory consists of 37 launchers and 55 bridges.



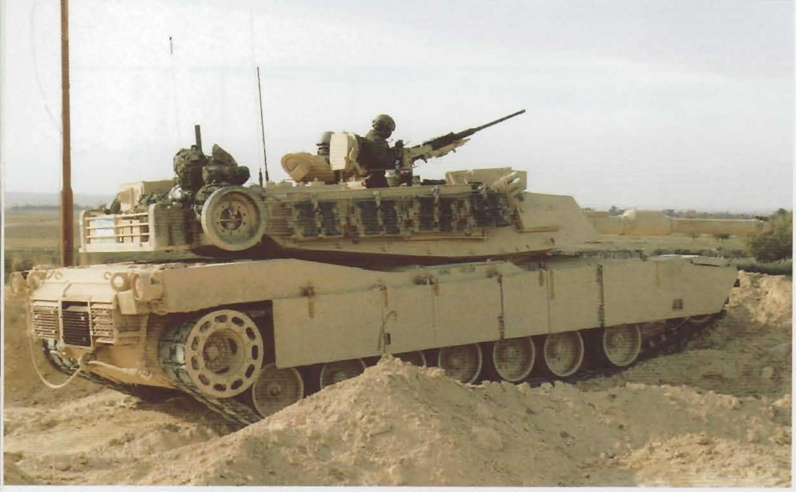
Memphis Bridge in Ubaydi as Army engineers prepare to remove the old bridge. This sand-colored M88A2 HERCULES belongs to Alpha Company of 2nd Tanks. Note the .50-cal M2 HB. The M88A2 offers significant performance improvements over the M88A1 – the hoist boom can lift objects 40% heavier, the winch can pull 55% more, and the vehicle can tow a load 25% heavier. (LCpl. Christopher Graham, USMC)

1/35 M88A2

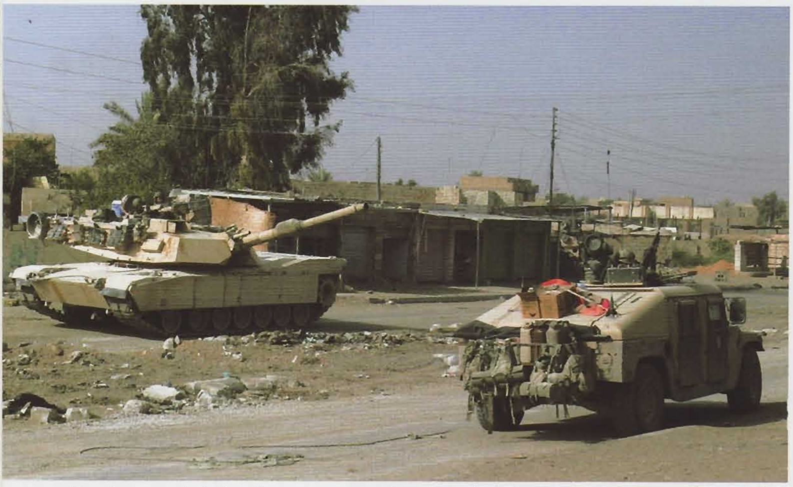

USMC 599867
CAP: 70,000LBS
DATE: 07/29/02
SMOKE GRENADES
TOW CABLE

M88A2 HERCULES, **Alpha Company, 2nd Tank Battalion, RCT-7**

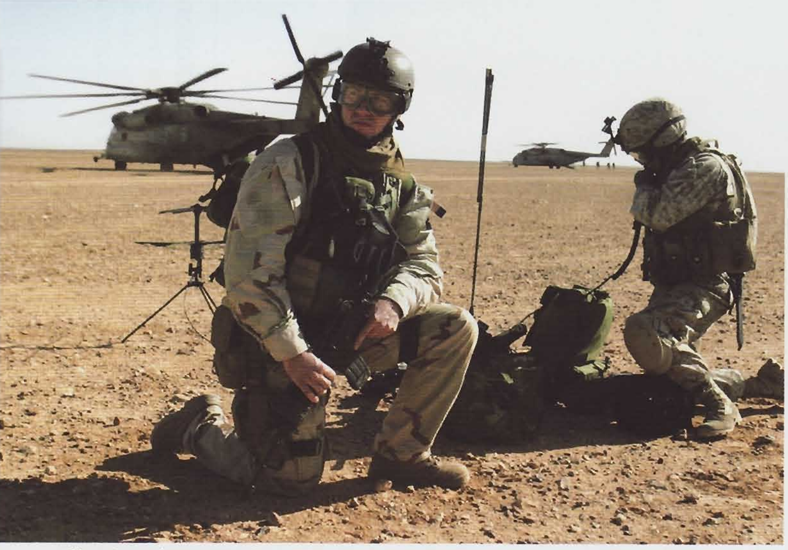
This recovery vehicle's USMC serial number is "599867". It is operated by 2nd Tank Battalion home stationed at Camp Lejeune. The heavier M88A2 HERCULES is found in tank and CLB (Combat Logistics Battalion) units. They are capable of recovering and towing the heaviest M1 variants without the need for a second recovery vehicle trailing attached as "brake," as was required with the earlier M88A1. Alpha Company deployed to OIF 2 in October 2004 and was attached to the 1st MarDiv's RCT-7 for its seven-month tour.



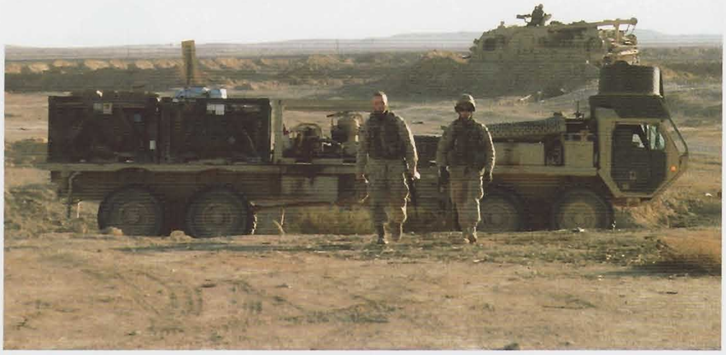
An M1A1 (USMC serial number "572358") of Alpha Company, 2nd Tank Battalion. Slightly below and to the left of the right hand taillight can be seen the TI "Grunt" phone, which most I MEF Abrams had installed before OIF kicked off. The "kit" consists of a new VIC-3 (Vehicle Inter-Communications) control box and handset tied into the vehicle's intercom system. The USMC will incorporate these TI phones on its entire Abrams fleet. (LCpl. Christopher Graham, USMC)



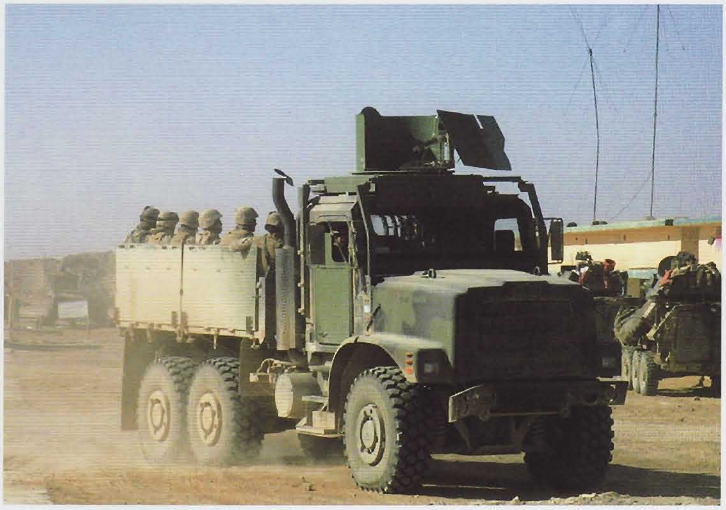
Tanks and infantry cooperate in clearing an area of Fallujah suspected of harboring insurgents in late November. "Maximus," an M1A1 Abrams from 2nd Tanks, will shortly be firing on a suspected insurgent stronghold. On the right is an M1046 Humvee fitted with a TOW missile launcher. (SSgt. Jonathan Knauth, USMC)



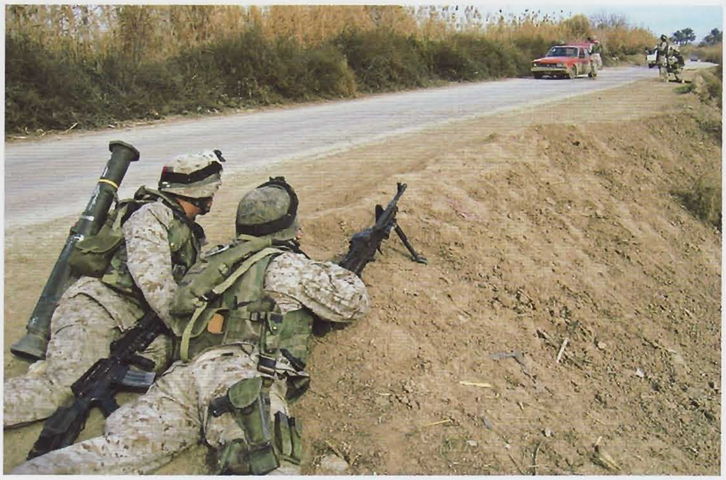
The border with Syria in the west is very porous, so U.S. forces are reconstructing border forts to provide better security. The 31st MEU was responsible for overseeing this work, and this photo shows an EOD (Explosive Ordnance Disposal) member near Fort 13 as a site survey is conducted. CH-53E Super Stallion helicopters are apparent in the background. (USMC)



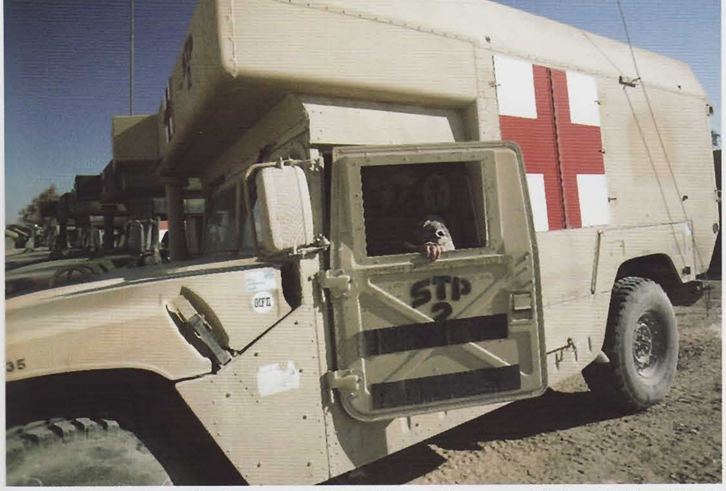
A Mk.48-14 LVS attached to 1/7 Marines in the Ubaydi area. Of special interest is the purpose-built 3/16-inch HHS armor added to the doors, and the protection provided for the roof gunner. In the first phase of the USMC LVS hardening program, armor was added to 204 trucks before I MEF departed for Iraq in March 2004. This included armored door sets produced at the Marine Corps Logistic Command Maintenance Center, and commercial Kevlar/ceramic panels. (LCpl. Christopher Graham, USMC)



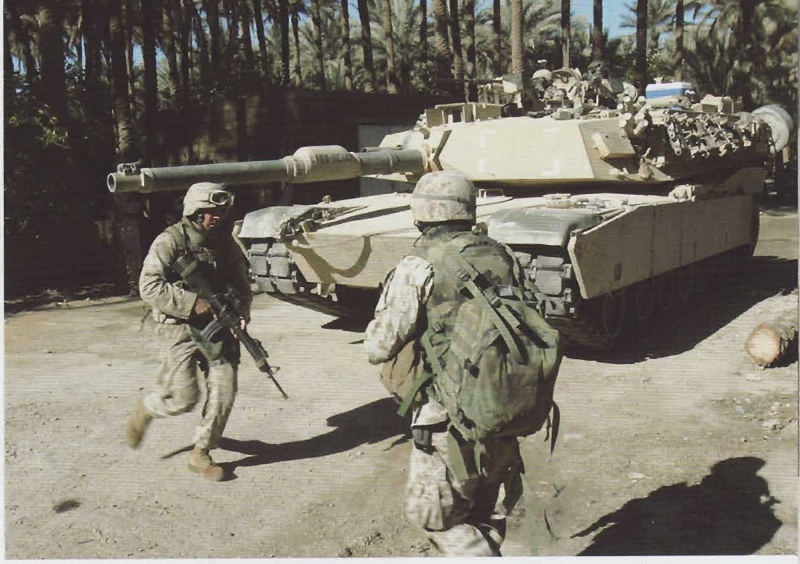
A typical OIF 2 MTVR departs Camp Owen on 16 December. Note the MAK (Marine Armor Kit) armor panels surrounding the cargo bed and the armored cab doors. Operations in Iraq have seen the re-emergence of "gun trucks" with protected positions for a crew-served weapon (generally an M2 MG or a 40mm Mk.19 grenade launcher). These hardened vehicles are positioned in convoys to provide maximum firepower. (LCpl. Jeremy Ferguson, USMC)



A vehicle checkpoint has been hastily set up near Sheik Mazar on New Year's Day 2005. This pair of Marines is armed with a mini-arsenal that includes an M240G, M9 pistol, M16A2 with forearm grip and light, and an AT-4 rocket launcher. They are part of 3rd Platoon, Charlie Company, BLT 1/2. The 9mm M9 pistol revealed some shortcomings during OIF, the biggest failing being weak magazine springs. (USMC)

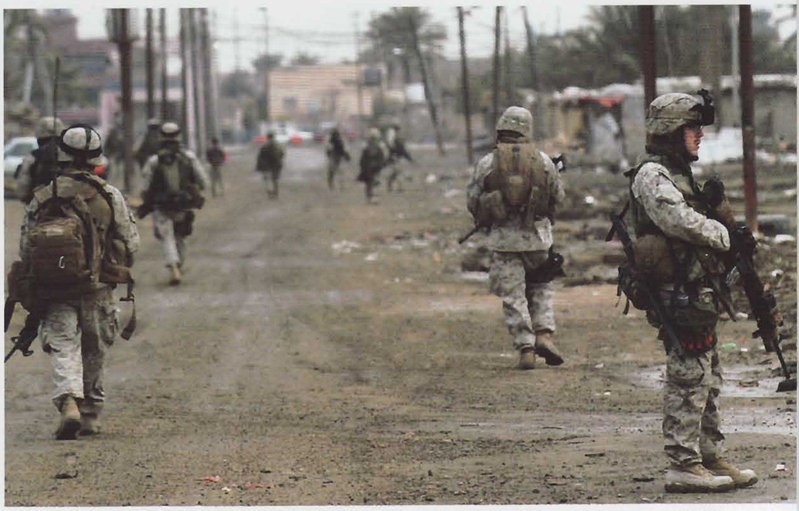


An M977 Maxi-ambulance of STP-2 (Shock Trauma Platoon). The M997 received rave reviews from its crews in OIF, but there were recommendations for future implementation: bulletproof glass, mini-refrigerator, redesigned interior with more storage space, and roof rack. Once delivered to the STP, there is a 95% chance that doctors and nurses can keep patients alive. Due to flak jackets and immediate medical care, the fatality ratio in Iraq is only one death to each eleven wounded, almost double the survival rate of previous wars. (USMC)

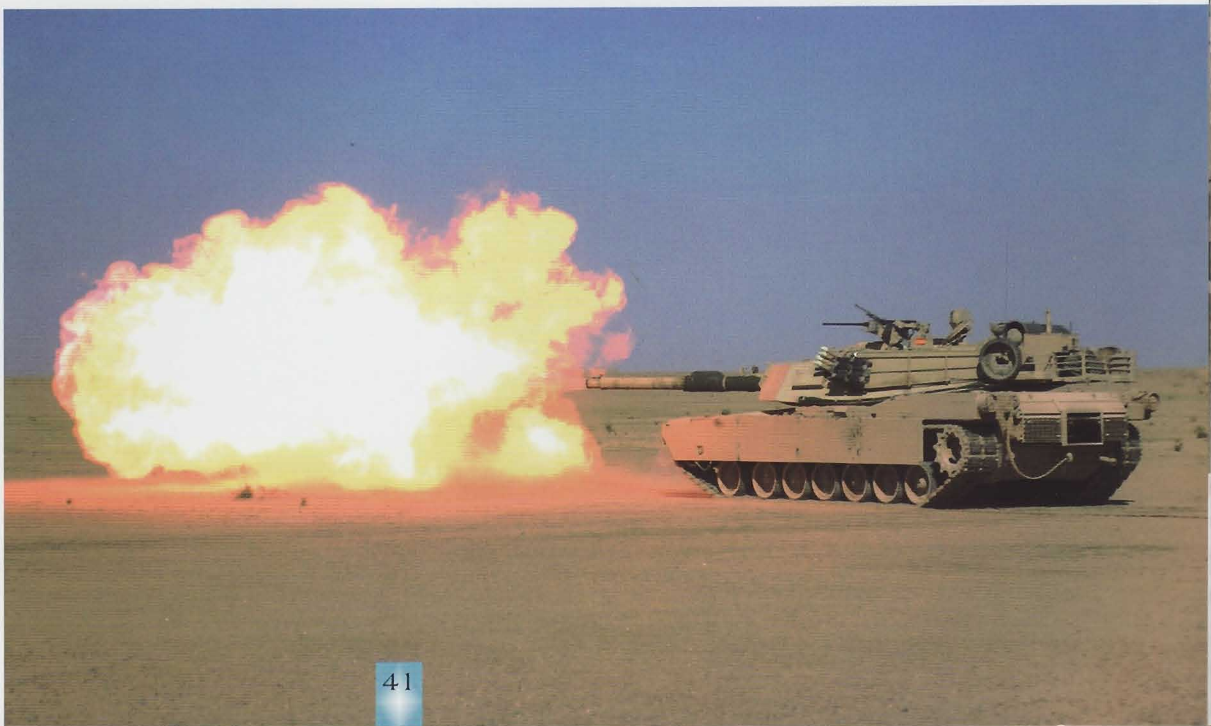


"Lion-Heart," an M1A1 tank, covers Marines as they are withdrawn from the city of Hadithah after a patrol on 12 January 2005. Note the blue ice cooler sitting on the turret; it contains chilled water bottles for the crewmen encased inside their sweltering steel vehicles. The gas turbine engine of the Abrams runs on almost any fuel, but it only gets half a mile to the gallon! (USMC)

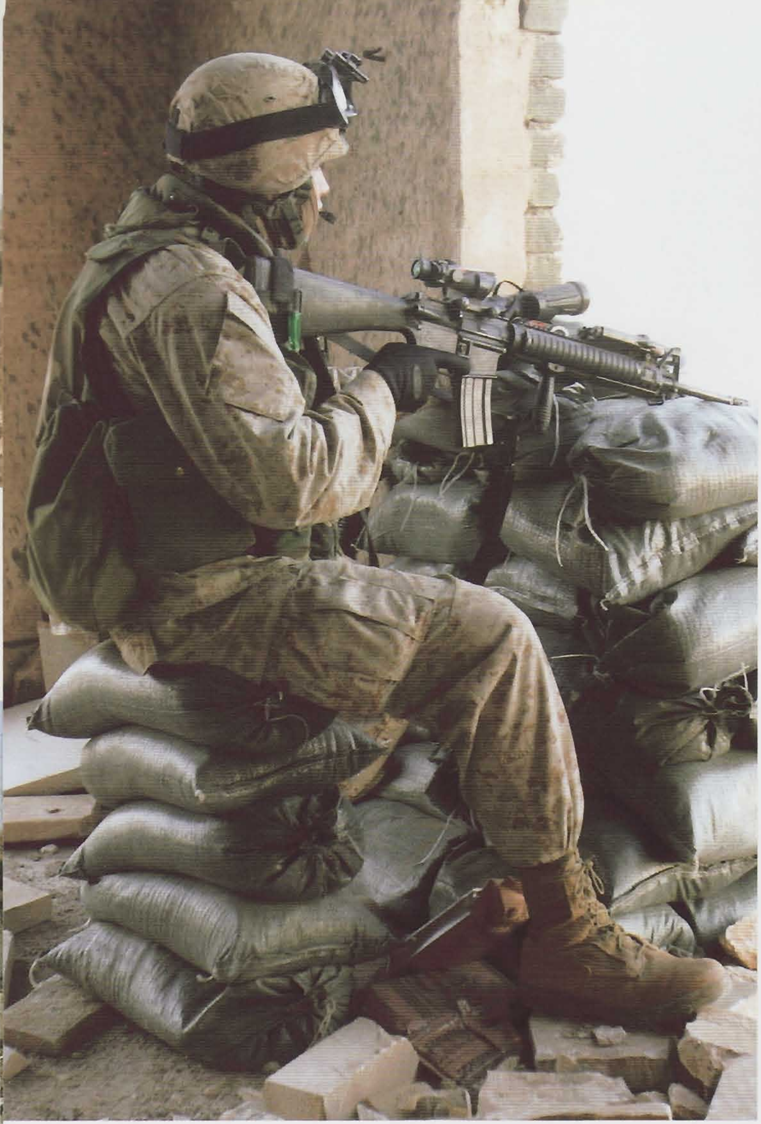
Marines from 1st Platoon, Golf Company, 2/5 Marines, radio in during a foot patrol in Ar Ramadi. FACs are usually attached to ground combat units to call in CAS. During Operation al-Fajr, F/A-18 pilots circled overhead in a cloverleaf pattern (a "keyhole") so they were able to instantly respond to four simultaneous requests for air strikes. (USMC)



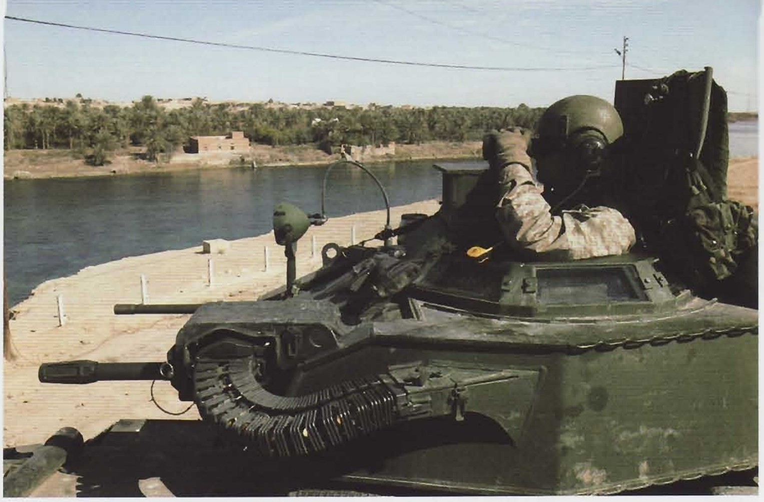
A patrol of Echo Company, 2/5 Marines, in Ar Ramadi in February 2005. Note the Remington 12-gauge pump-action shotgun slung over the back of the Marine on the extreme right. (USMC)



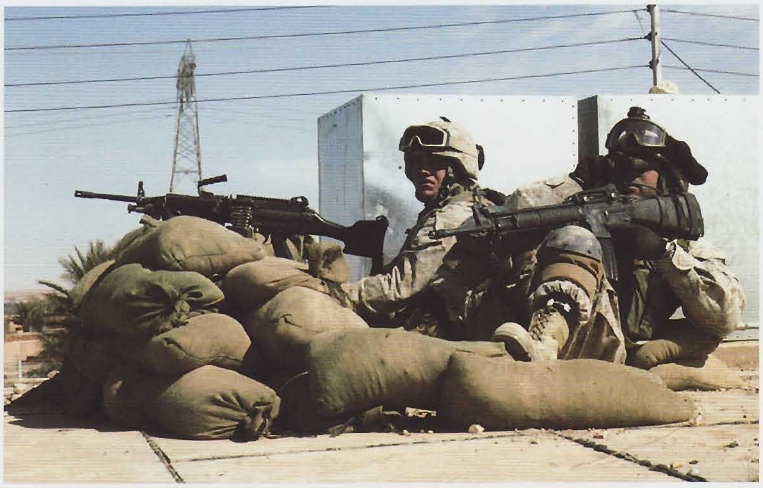
During a gunnery training, flame shoots out dramatically from the muzzle of the 120mm M256 gun of an M1A1 Abrams as a round is fired downrange. This tank belongs to Tank Platoon of BLT 1/4. This type of training occurs on a monthly basis in order to maintain the proficiency of tank crews. (GySgt. Robert Blankenship, USMC)



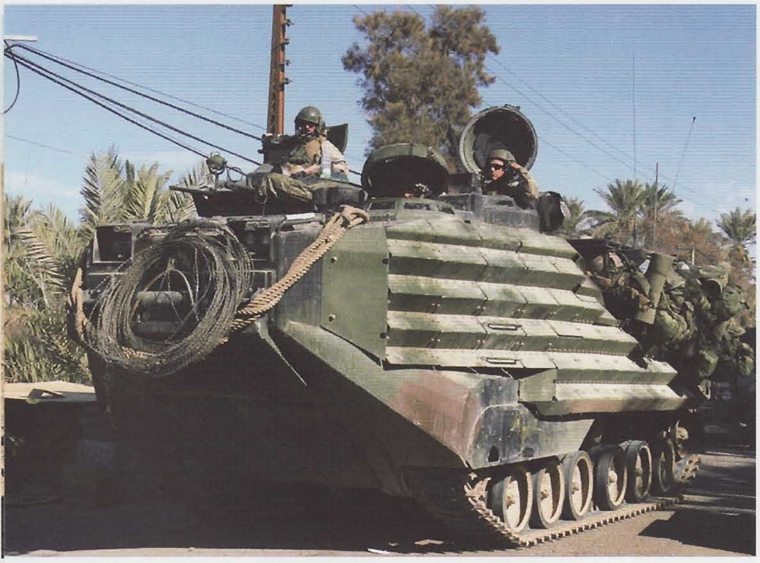
A corporal from Fox Company, 2/5 Marines, provides security during a vehicle checkpoint in Ar Ramadi. His M16A4 is fitted with a host of accessories including an ACOG sight and AN/PEQ-2A aiming light. The plate on his helmet is for attaching NVGs (Night Vision Goggles). However, as was demonstrated in the Fallujah fighting, urban combat is usually a daylight affair since NVGs deprive soldiers of depth perception. (LCpl. Andrew Young, USMC)



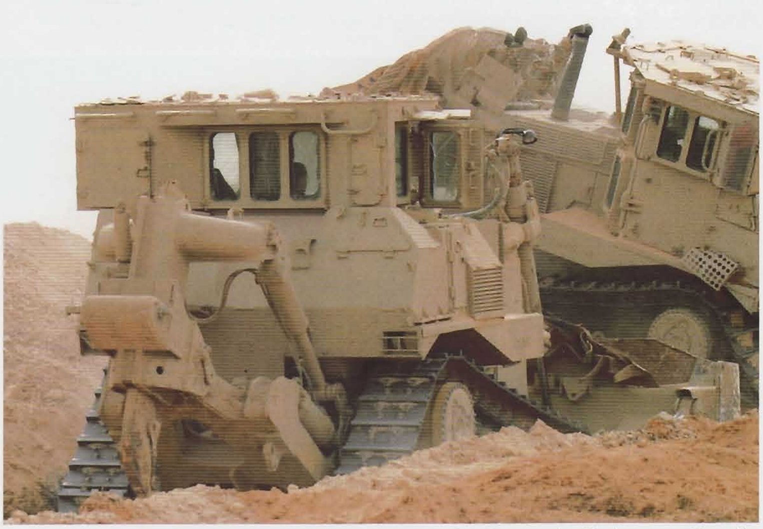
A close-up of an AAV7PA1 UGWS as a commander scans the opposite bank of the Euphrates River with his binoculars near Haqlaniyah on 23 February 2005. This AAV belongs to C Company, 2nd AAB. The AAV has a 12.7mm M48 MG (visible on the front right side) and a 40mm Mk.19 Mod.3 automatic grenade launcher (on the left) mounted in its electrically operated turret. These weapons have a maximum elevation of +60° and depression of -15°. (Cpl. Jan Bender, USMC)



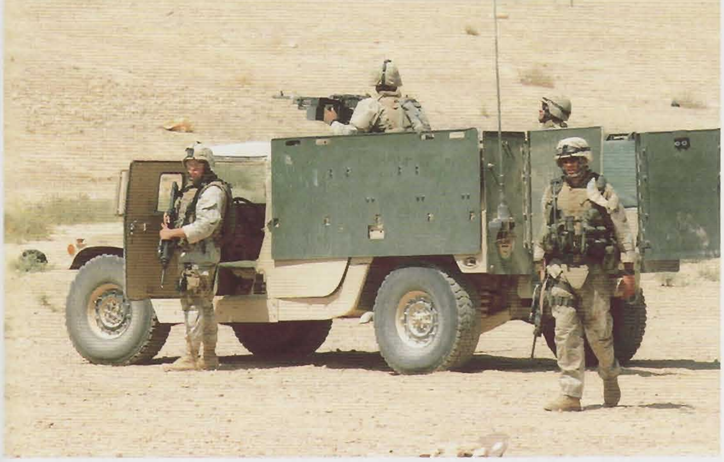
A pair of Marines of H&S Company of 1/23 Battalion sits behind a pile of sandbags on a school rooftop in Haqlaniyah in an over-watch position. Their weapons include an M249 SAW, an American version of the Belgian FN Minimi. The short-barreled version of the SAW is better suited to combat in urban areas since it is more maneuverable. (Cpl. Jan Bender, USMC)



A "Tuna Boat" with coils of razor wire stowed on the bow. This AAV7PA1 clad in an EAAK belongs to D Company, 2nd AAB, normally part of the 2nd MarDiv. Here it is supporting India Company, 3/5 Marines, as they patrol the western edge of the town of Saqlawiyah on 24 February 2005. (LCpl. James Vooris, USMC)

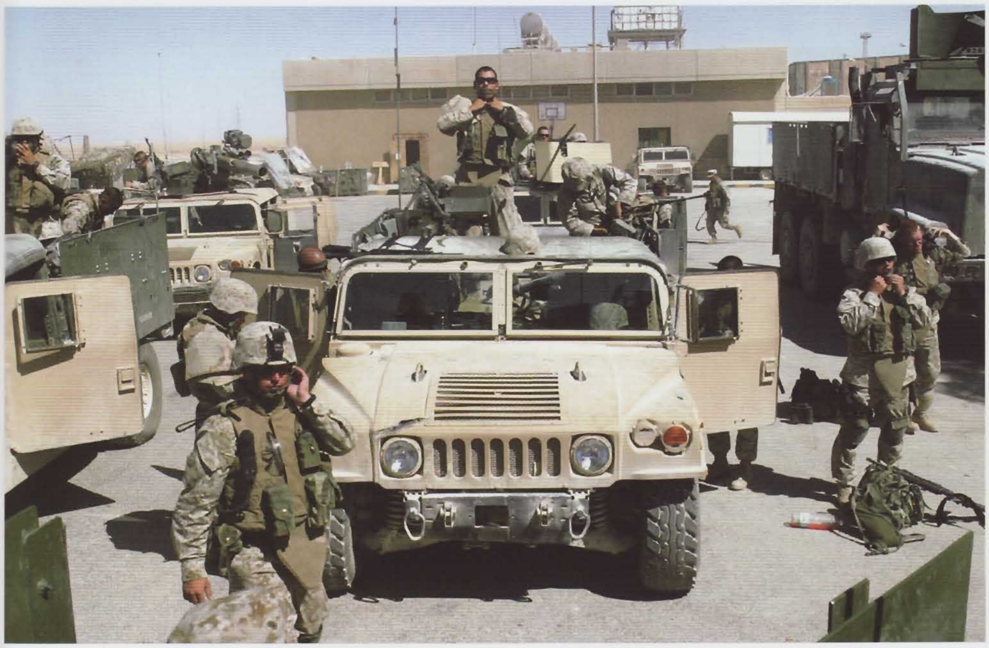


Powerful D9R bulldozers from Heavy Equipment Platoon, Charlie Company, 2nd CEB (Combat Engineer Battalion) are caught in action as they form an earth berm along the Syrian border. The D9R is powered by a Caterpillar 3408E HEUI 18-litre diesel engine that produces 474hp. The front blade is 1.8m high and 4.58m wide, and a large hydraulically operated ripper is mounted on the rear. (LCpl. Christopher Graham, USMC)

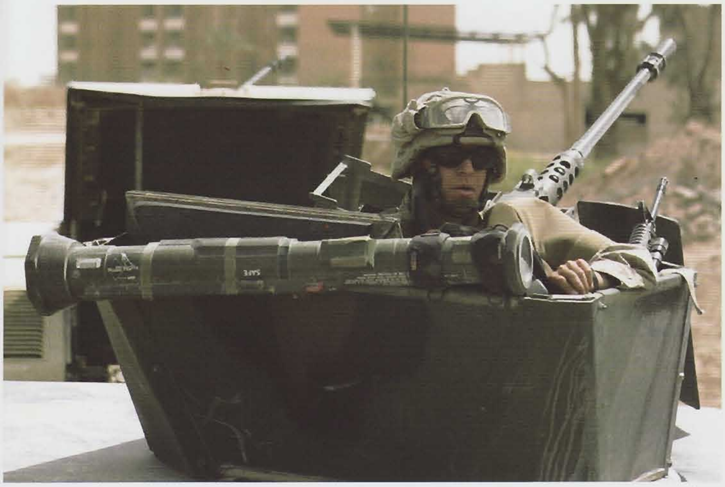


An Humvee with an ASK (Armor Survivability Kit), though the rear compartment occupants are still exposed to overhead attacks. The ASK is made in two versions to fit two-door or four-door Humvees. It includes armored doors with opening ballistic windows, heavy-duty door hinges, armored seatbacks, reinforced floor panels, ballistic windscreen, and rocker protection panels. These personnel are from CAAT White 1, Weapons Company, 3/7 Marines. (LCpl. Michael McMaugh, USMC)

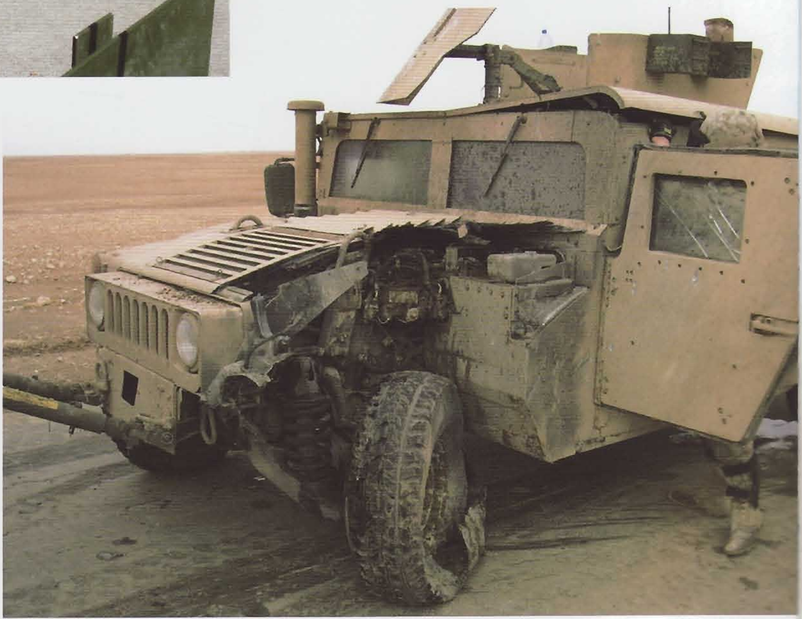
During an assault on Haqlaniyah Island, members of 1st Platoon, C Company, 1/7 Marines, provide security. The Marine in the foreground searches for enemy activity with the 4x32 magnification of an ACOG sight mounted on his M16A4's Picatinny rail. One member is armed with an M1014 Joint Service Shotgun with telescoping stock, a weapon indispensable in breaching the many steel doors found in urban environments. (USMC)



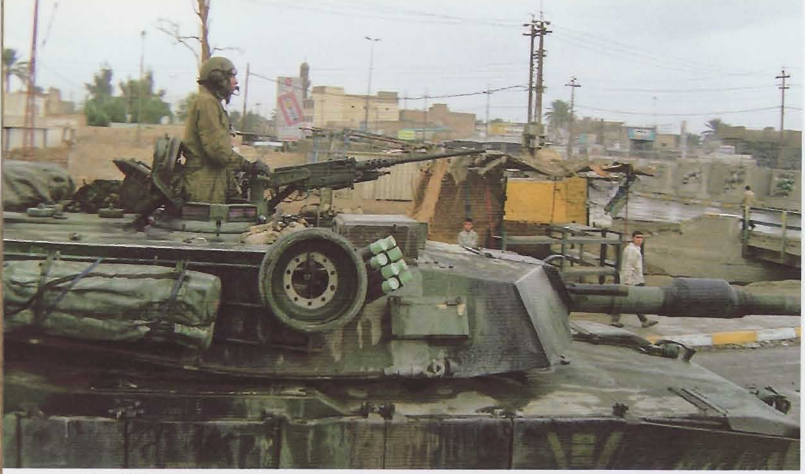
These 3/2 Marines vehicles fitted with ASKs are bristling with MGs. In Iraq a small lead or trail security element consisting of at least two armored Humvees with crew-served weapons proceed and follow a convoy by 300-500 meters. The purpose of the lead element is to conduct over-watch of overpasses and danger areas, while the trailing security element prevents the convoy from being attacked from the rear. If attacked, troops are trained to respond immediately with a high volume of aimed fire. (LCpl. Lucian Friel, USMC)



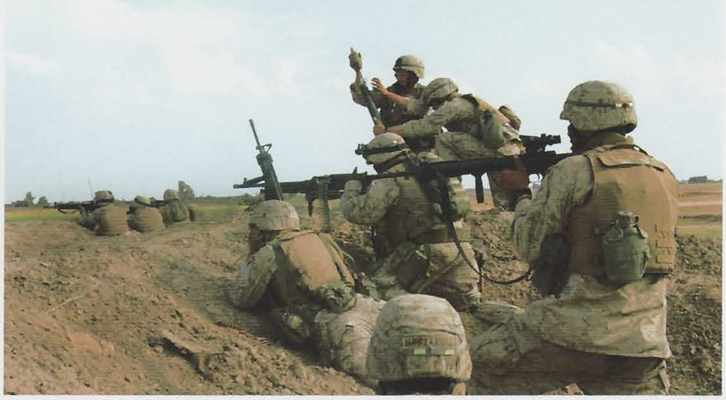
Indicative of gradually improving protection, this Marine is safely ensconced in his armored 'nest' atop a Humvee. This 145kg Gunner Protection Kit is manufactured by O'Gara-Hess & Eisenhard. The gunner of the PSD (Personal Security Detail) Platoon of 1/6 Marines is surrounded by an arsenal that includes an M4A1, .50-cal M2 MG, and AT-4. The AT-4 is a single-shot, disposable version of the Swedish 84mm "Karl Gustav," with an effective range of 300m. (Cpl. Mike Escobar, USMC)



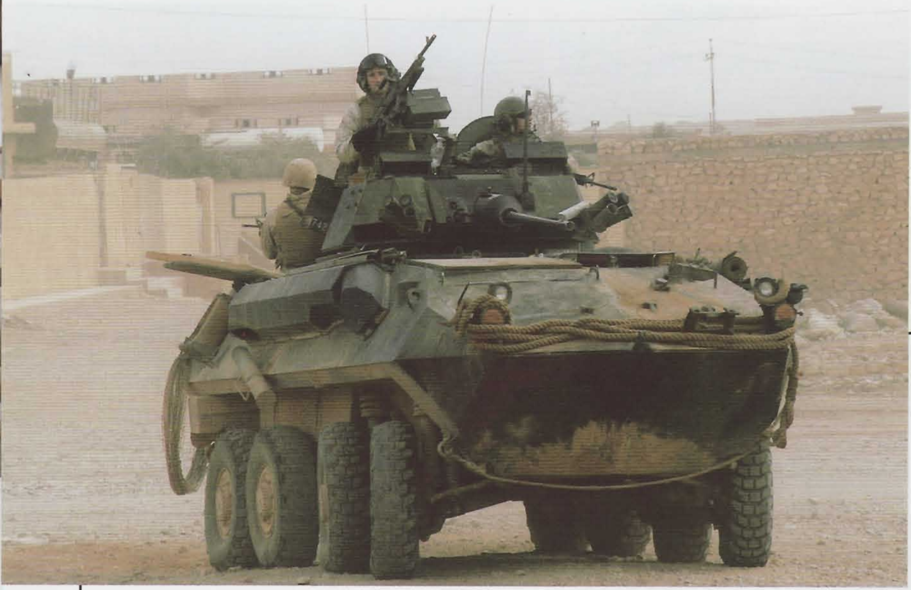
This up-armored M1114 Humvee struck a mine and is being rigged for towing back to the motor pool. It will require major repairs but the occupants walked away from the incident. Its Gunner Protection Kit offers 360° protection for the roof gunner. The ballistic glass in the side window was cracked but not broken by the mine blast. The protection afforded by the M1114 is vastly superior to anything achieved by modifying standard Humvees. (Sgt. Rick Noble, USMC)



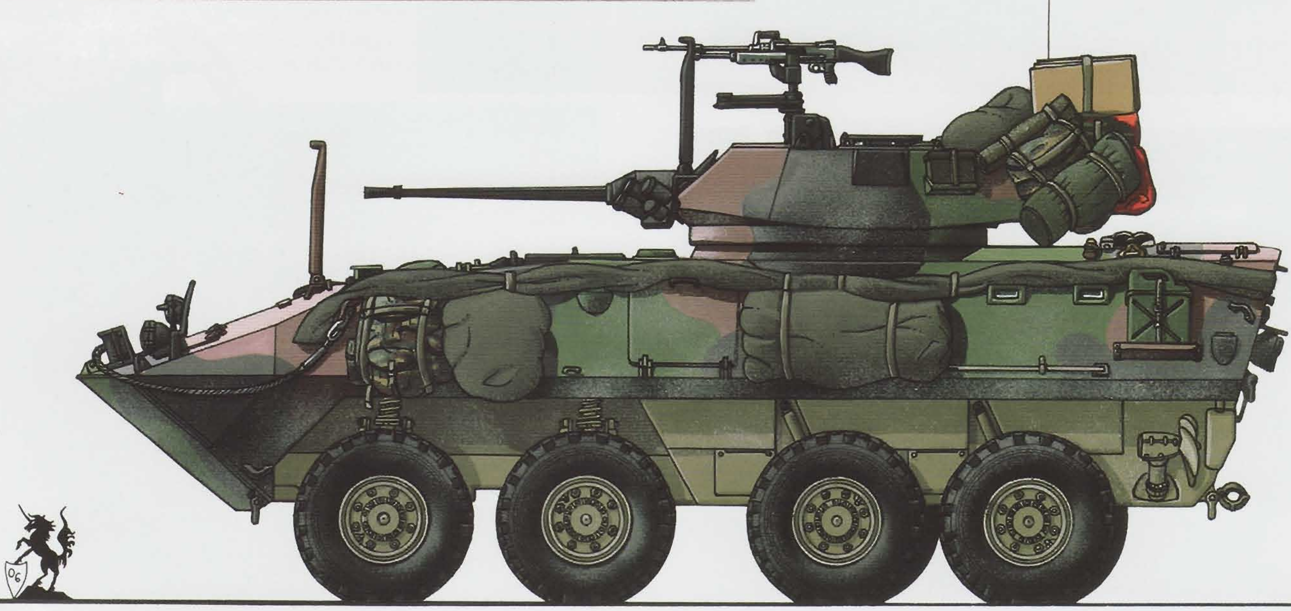
This M1A1 has a full set of smoke grenades loaded in its launchers as it provides security on a street in northern Babil province. The tank is from 3rd Platoon, Charlie Company, 2nd Tank Battalion, as denoted by the side skirt markings – a green "V" with three rectangles arranged vertically in the open end of the chevron. The tank is attached to BLT 1/2 of the 24th MEU. (USMC)



After their convoy came under mortar attack, these "Leathernecks" of Fox Company, 2/2 Marines, return fire. In the background is an M224 60mm mortar. Observe the vertical forearm grip on the M16A4 of the Marine on the right. Each Marine fire team consists of four men armed with one 5.56mm M249 SAW and three 5.56mm M16A4 assault rifles. The grenadier's M16A4 is fitted with a 40mm M203 grenade launcher under the barrel. (Cpl. Shawn Rhodes, USMC)



An LAV-25 of the 3rd LAR posts security during a patrol of Ar Rutbah on New Year's Day 2005. (LCpl. Richard Hilario, USMC)



LAV-25, 3rd LAR (Light Armored Reconnaissance) Battalion

Swathed in crew gear and extra equipment, this LAV-25 bears a three-color NATO camouflage scheme. Unlike Army vehicles, there are few, if any, tactical or unit markings apparent on Marine vehicles in Iraq beginning with OIF 2. The two erected wire cutters – one in front of the driver's hatch and the other above the gun mantlet – protect the crew from being decapitated by wires strung across roadways. 3rd LAR Battalion, nicknamed "Wolfpack," is based at Twentynine Palms, California. The battalion redeployed back to the USA in early April 2005 after a seven-month tour of duty with RCT-7.

Logistics and Supply Convoys

In a guerilla-style conflict, logistics convoys are particularly vulnerable to attack by ambushes, mines or IEDs. In Iraq, IEDs are the chief threat faced by Coalition troops. Thus, route clearing and patrols are of particular importance. In fact, between July 2004 and March 2005, a period of only nine months, there were a chilling 15,257 separate IED attacks throughout Iraq against Coalition forces. IEDs are homemade devices incorporating a fuse or other initiation device, a detonator and its power supply, a container, and, of course, explosives. Since they are improvised, they come in all manner of guises and sizes, but usually the bombs utilize mortar or artillery shells. IEDs can be planted on roadsides, packed into vehicles, or carried by suicide bombers.

Usually, transport trucks in any military force are not armored or well protected, and this was certainly the case with the U.S. Army and the USMC. In fact, the military was quite unprepared for the asymmetric form of warfare that rapidly evolved in Iraq, particularly in terms of protecting its wheeled fleet of vehicles. To help overcome this weakness, many American trucks in Iraq have been up-armored and have had heavy weapons like machine guns or automatic grenade launchers fitted. MPs are ever present on Iraqi roads, and hence bear a disproportionately heavy number of casualties. Patrols in Iraq must consist of at least four vehicles for the sake of safety and security.

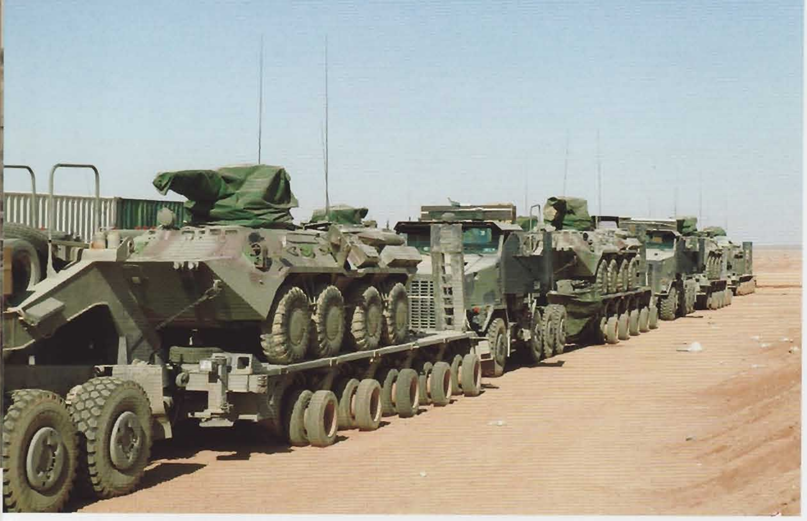
Conclusion

The type of counterinsurgency occurring in Iraq is one that cannot be won by brute force by a military occupation force, no matter how technologically sophisticated it might be. In a telling statement, General Myers announced in a press conference in the Pentagon on 26 April 2005: "Their [the insurgents'] capability is about where it was a year ago." While American combat units had held the line during OIF 2, with Marines of I MEF bearing much of the brunt, the insurgency was nowhere nearer being quelled. Battles like those for Fallujah may have been won by overwhelming military firepower, but a satisfactory result in the larger battle for Iraq remains elusive in this "Long War", as many in the U.S. military are now calling the campaign.

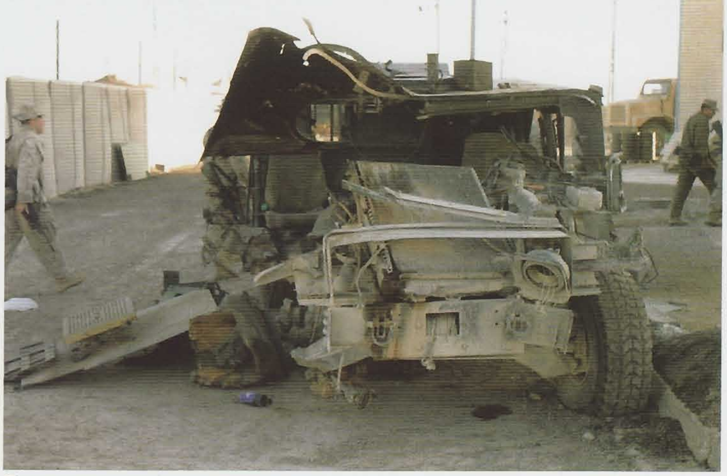
Iraq may have been defeated in battle in 2003, but psychologically, many of its citizens were far from surrendering. Nevertheless, Marines of I MEF had shown their mettle in Al Anbar province, demonstrating that they were more than a match for any insurgent willing to take them on head to head. After approximately 12 months in-theater, I MEF was replaced by II MEF.

Marines of CSSC-111 (Combat Service Support Company) hurriedly unload supplies from 7-ton MTVRs on 8 April, as a firefight crackles on a few blocks north in Fallujah. During Operation Vigilant Resolve, this company trucked in approximately 90% of the ammunition, food and water necessary to keep troops fighting. (SSgt. Bill Lisbon, USMC)

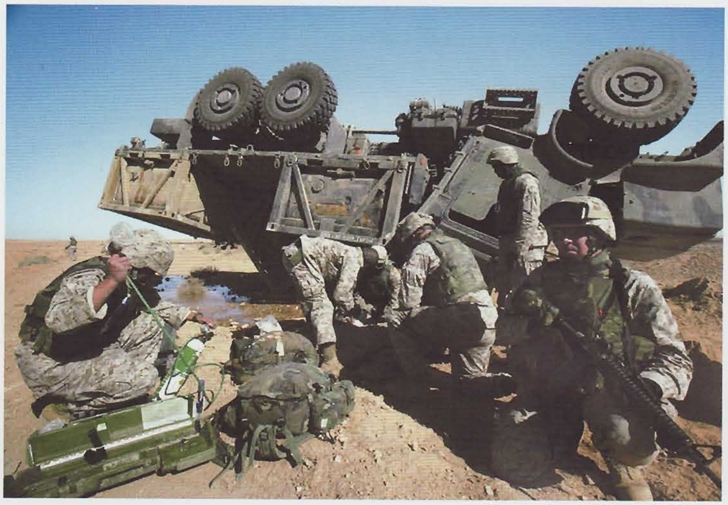
Members of B Company, 2nd MP Battalion, stand guard beside their M1044 Humvee just north of Fallujah's city limits on 9 April. Of special note is the ballistic protection worn over their shoulders and upper arms. In Fallujah, one Marine was hit 12 times but his life was saved by his IBA. Manufactured by Point Blank Body Armor, the Kevlar weave of the system's outer tactical vest can stop 9mm rounds, while the two boron carbide ceramic inserts can stop a 7.62mm round. (LCpl. Samuel Bard Valliere, USMC).



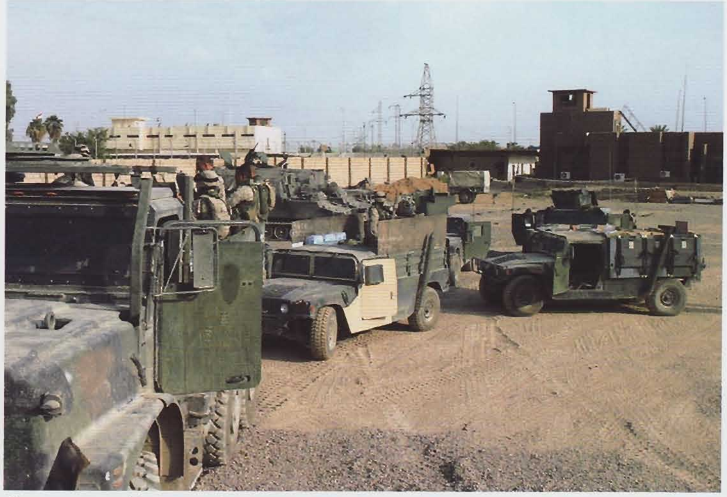
This is part of a huge Army and Marine convoy that traveled from Jordan to Baghdad on 25 July to deliver a consignment of 56 armored vehicles donated by the Jordanian Government. Each HETS (Heavy Equipment Transporter System) carries a BTR-94, a Ukrainian BTR-80 variant that has a turret-mounted ZU-23-2 gun, a coaxial PKT MG and surveillance radar. (Cpl. Macario Mora Jr., USMC)



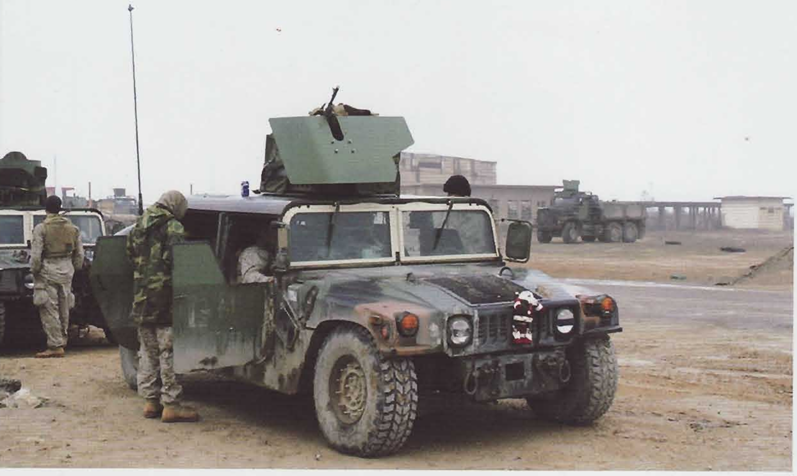
The remains of a HMMWV of CAAT Red, Weapons Company of 1/7 Marines, after it struck a mine. One occupant was killed, and here the wreck is displayed at Camp Gannon in Husaybah. By November of 2004, commanders had conceded that Humvee armor was insufficient, and they announced a program to install a new generation of tougher and better kits containing hardened roofs, gunner shields and reinforced doors. (LCpl. Christopher Graham, USMC)



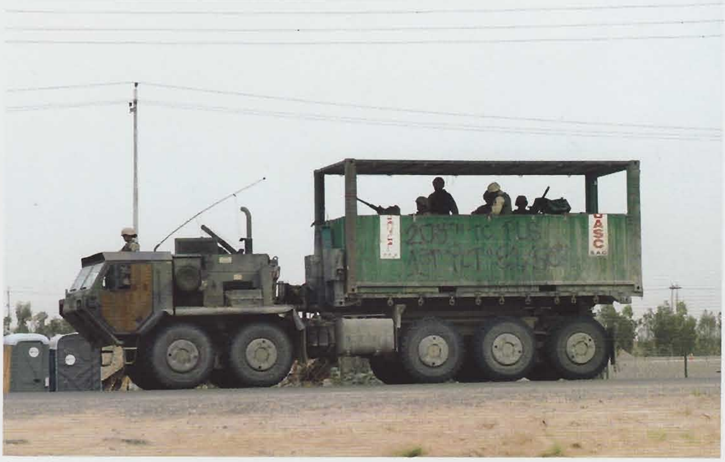
Two injured crewmen are treated by several Navy Corpsmen at an accident site. This Mk.23 MTVR of CSSC-119 was part of a supply convoy transporting water to Camp KV when its CTIS (Central Tire Inflation System) malfunctioned, causing it to veer off the road. There have been numerous accidents and rollovers in Iraq, usually caused by following too closely, driving too fast, fatigue, or poor visibility in dust clouds. (USMC)



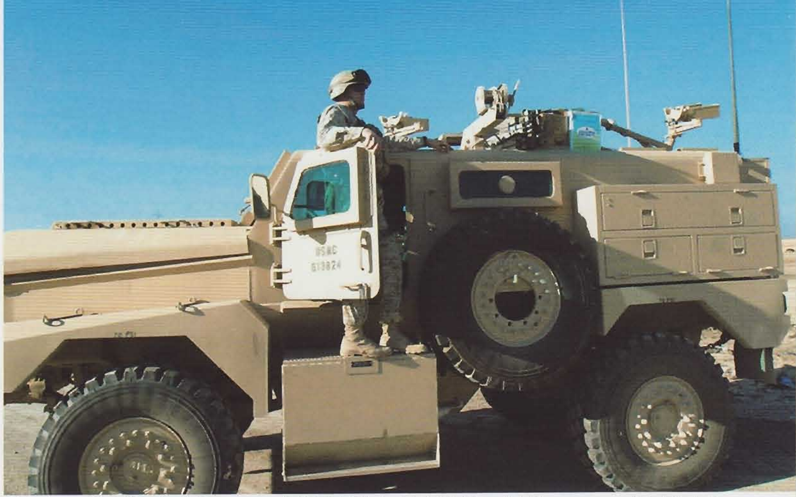
A convoy of 1st and 2nd Platoons, Echo Company, 2/5 Marines, sets off to deliver medical supplies to a hospital in Ar Ramadi. Note the makeshift steel plates on the first M1038 Humvee, and Kevlar liners affixed to the rear of the second. Ring mounts for roof-mounted weapons are essential in providing a stable platform for gunners firing at ambushers. (LCpl. Benjamin Flores, USMC)



Marines from BLT 1/3, 31st MEU (SOC), set off on a Christmas Day convoy in their up-armored M1026 Humvee. One Marine reported at least one vehicle is in need of heavy maintenance after almost every patrol. Marines drive hard, and once their seven-month deployment is completed, vehicles are turned over to the next unit. After several tours like this, the Marine fleet is in dire need of a new infusion of vehicles. (USMC)

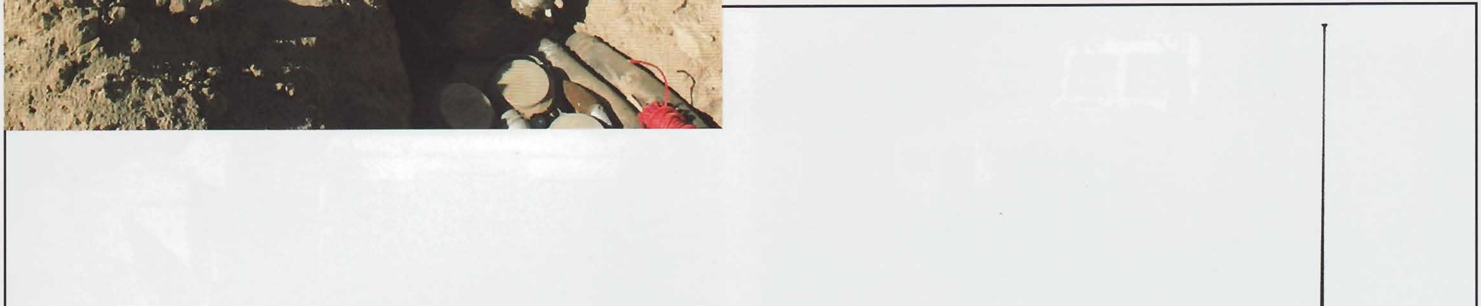


Spotted in Al Anbar province was this Army M1075 HEMTT PLS (Palletized Load System) "Dragon Wagon" boasting an ISO container mounting two .50-cal MGs. The container is not for logistics handling, but for crew protection! U.S. forces in Iraq were forced to use improvised hardening to counter the increasing use and power of insurgent IEDs. (MSgt. Buzz Farrell, USMC)



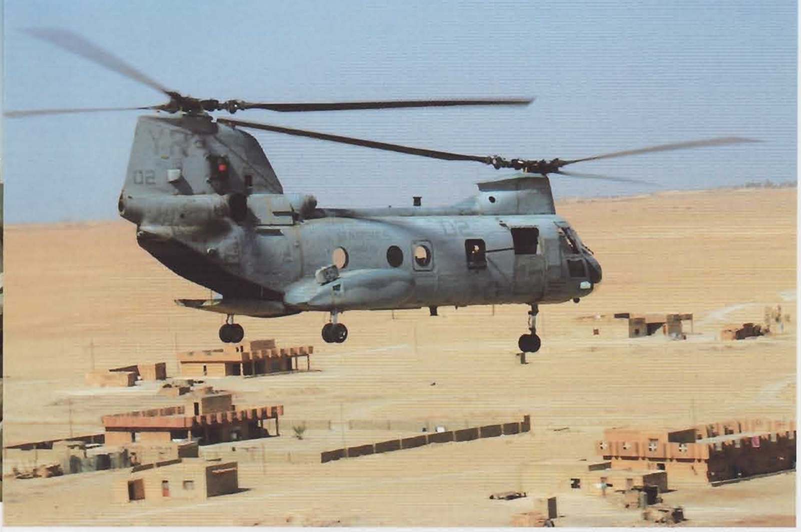
This is a USMC 4x4 Cougar JERRV (Joint EOD Rapid Response Vehicle), also referred to as an HEV (Hardened Engineer Vehicle). I MEF issued an urgent contract for 27 Cougars in December 2003, with the first 14 being delivered in September 2004. The hardened vehicle is designed to withstand 7.62mm rounds, IED detonations and mines. An EOD technician of CSSB-1 watches as a weapons cache is detonated. (USMC)

The Cougar JERRV, powered by a Caterpillar C-7 diesel engine, is a brand new piece of equipment for the USMC in Iraq. Its curb weight is 13.6 tons, and it can carry four passengers plus a large EOD robot, in addition to the driver and co-driver up front. The Cougar greatly improves the level of protection for Marines detecting and removing IEDs. A total of 122 Cougars will be fielded under subsequent contracts. (USMC)

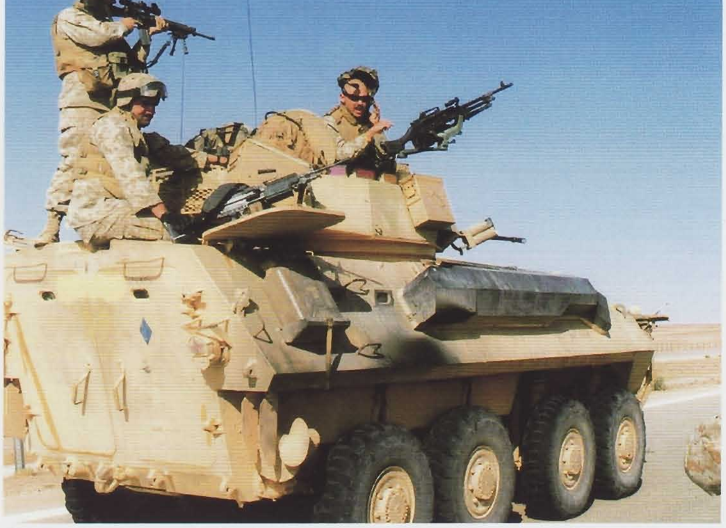


Cougar 4x4 JERRV (Joint Explosive Ordnance Disposal Rapid Response Vehicle), CSSB-1

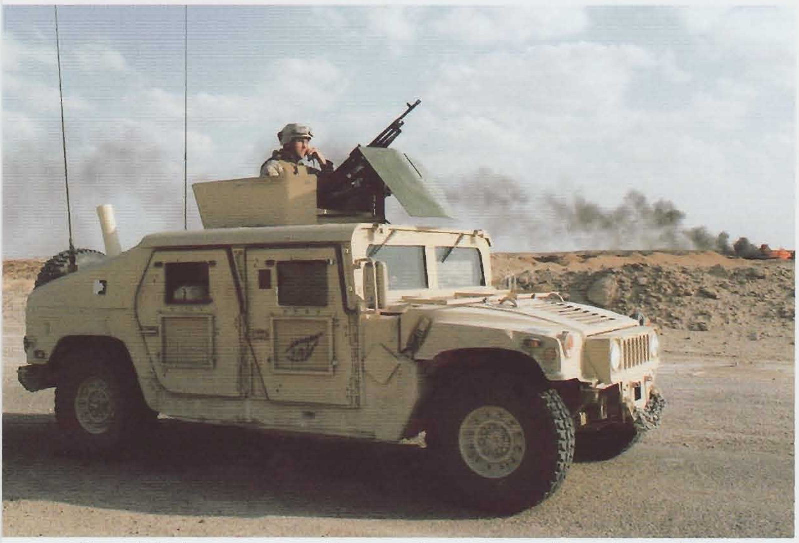
This 12-ton JERRV Cougar bears registration markings but no tactical markings, typical for USMC vehicles beginning from February 2004. The USMC serial number "613824" appears in black on both front doors. The JERRV is manufactured for the USMC by Force Protection Inc. of South Carolina. The vehicle is a South African design and the Cougar's dimensions are 5.627m long, 2.52m wide and 2.62m high. This version designed for EOD personnel has room for six crewmen and an EOD robot. There is provision to mount a machine gun on the roof.



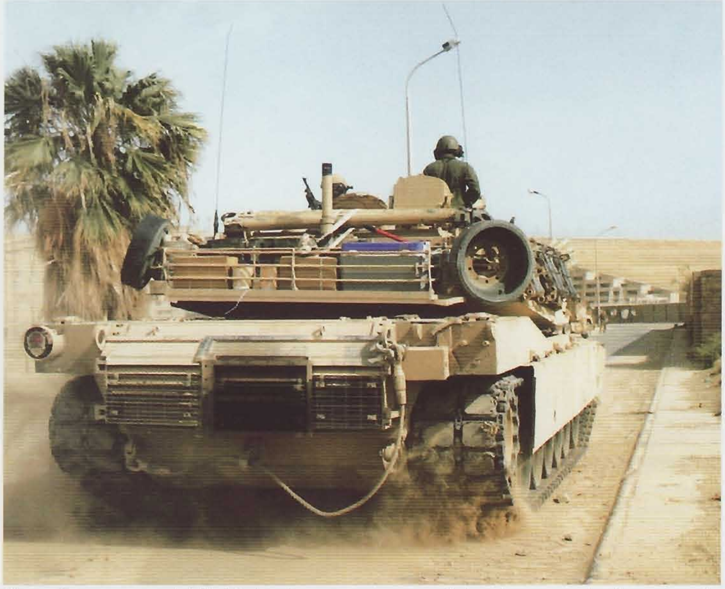
A CH-46E Sea Knight flies over a small village near Fallujah at a maximum speed of 259km/h. The aging helicopter belongs to HMM-161. When employed for medical evacuation, 15 stretchers and two medical Corpsmen can be carried. CH-46E helicopters provided a 24-hour medevac capability during the battle of Fallujah, transporting wounded to the STP at Al Taqaddum Airbase. (Sgt. Nathan LaForte, USMC)



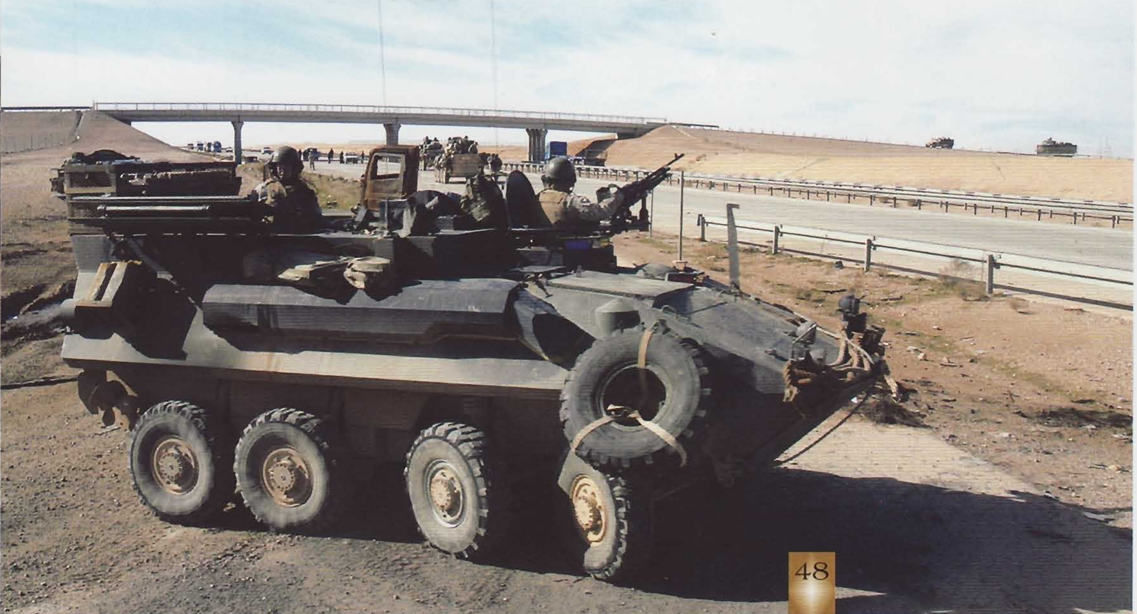
This LAV-25 from the 3rd LAR Battalion is providing security in western Al Anbar province, 25km from Camp Korean Village. Worthy of special mention is the "Blue Diamond" marking on the rear door, a marking applied to most vehicles of the 1st MarDiv prior to shipment by commercial vessels that helped Marines to find their vehicles at the port of debarkation. Blue Diamond is the 1st MarDiv radio call sign. (Cpl. Marsha Garcia, USMC)



This M1114 up-armored Humvee is on a security patrol outside Camp TQ on 23 March 2005. It belongs to 3rd Platoon, Bravo Company of the 2nd MP Battalion, a unit normally based at Camp Lejeune. After a slow start, M1114s (with hardened roofs, underside protection and a fortified chassis to handle more than 1300kg of extra weight) eventually started churning off U.S. assembly lines. (PFC Brian Jaques, USMC)



Heavily armored M1A1 tanks are a powerful adversary to insurgents, and are often used to support operations in Iraq. This Abrams returns to Camp Hadithah, with a tow bar stowed atop the turret and spare road wheels mounted on the BRE. (LCpl. Brian Jaques, USMC)



This LAV-L from 3rd LAR Battalion has parked alongside a highway shortly before a convoy passes along the MSR. U.S. military wheeled vehicles are operating five or six times their programmed usage rate, with wear further compounded by the heavy armor kits many vehicles are carrying. (LCpl. Richard Hilario, USMC)

ISBN 962-361-140-4

CONCORD
PUBLICATIONS COMPANY